

INDIA'S SEARCH FOR

DEVELOPMENT AND

SOCIAL JUSTICE

* ANALYSIS OF INDIAN SOCIETY

2. The Indian Situation

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*The list of appendices is given on page 47

A Few Measures and Abbreviations

1 crore = 10 millions

1 lakh = 100,000

1 U.S. \$ = about Rs 8.85 (May 1976)

NSS: National Sample Survey

NCAER: Nat. Council of Applied Eco. Research

EPW: Economic and Political Weekly

FOREWORD

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CELL

PEOPLE who want to build up a just and fraternal world are growing in number and commitment. They know that goodwill and dedication do not suffice. They recognize more and more the following requirements for their lives:

- a deep understanding of the complex problems of development and social justice and of the functioning of the world in which they live;
- a clear vision of the type of society they want to build;
- a realistic plan of action, with proper strategies and tactics; and
- a suitable training and experience which will enable them to feel and think with the masses and to become true animators, community organizers, and grass-root political workers. However controversial and difficult these questions might be, they cannot be avoided any more.

The CSA (Centre for Social Action) was created in view of answering these urgent needs. Our aims are threefold:

—(i) **to make available relevant material on development and social justice.** In this respect, we will act as Editors of various booklets. Without necessarily agreeing with the detailed content of these publications, we will be responsible for the general orientation, thus seeing to the unity and coherence of the whole series.

—(ii) **to provide further encouragement, guidance and training to interested persons and groups.** We hope that our booklets will enable us to enter into deeper contact and collaborate with each other.

—(iii) **to help people rethink and reorientate their action to bring about social justice and true democratic socialism in India.** We shall take clear and firm stands on these issues whenever contemporary research makes it possible. We are also convinced—and we are sure our readers will share this view!—that mere words achieve very little. Our whole analysis is, therefore, action-oriented. Booklets nine to fifteen study possibilities of meaningful and realistic fields of involvement for social change in health care, law, development work, education, conscientization, mass organizations and politics.

These publications are not for experts or for people who are highly politicised. They provide non-technical, yet rather comprehensive introductions, for educated people who are still searching to deepen their reflection and action. Though sometimes dealing with relevant religious questions, these booklets are addressed to all, irrespective of creed and religion. Briefly, we want to help the general public to focus their attention on the main issues to be able to take a stand.

With the titles of the booklets on the back cover page, it is easy to grasp the plan of our study. In our series on "India's Search for Development and Social Justice", the first eight booklets analyse Indian Society. Such a study may appear somewhat theoretical and superfluous to some of our readers. We are, however, convinced that efficient action, even at the micro level, requires a scientific understanding of the society we live in. This is why we felt the need of insisting on this long-neglected topic. After describing the different development theories and the Indian situation in our two introductory booklets, we present our method of analysis in our third booklet. The following five booklets respectively deal with the recent historical background of India – the British Rule and the Independence Movement –, and the basic assumptions, policies and structural organisation of our country in the economic, social, political, and culturo-religious fields. The second part, entitled "Towards a New India", begins with a description of the society we want to build and some general reflections on problems of strategies and tactics. It further provides guidelines for action for people involved in various fields.

So far only four books are foreseen in the second series. We are sure that it will be necessary to extend this list in the near future. Our intention is to reflect on various subjects which are relevant to the issues of development and social justice. We have selected four such topics guided by the needs they fulfil for our readers.

The Editors

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THE INDIAN SITUATION

Introduction: Is India Progressing?

In a recent book, Ajit Roy describes the total misery and helplessness of the Indian masses by a random selection of 1972 Press reports: "Six members of a family in the village of Majhua...., Bihar, recently committed suicide by hanging themselves, because they were unable to get foodgrains". A carpenter of village Katnikol in Sheikpura Thana of Monghyr district allegedly administered poison to his three children and wife on Monday last to end their misery caused by prolonged starvation. All the family died". "An agricultural labourer (aged 30), his wife (aged 27) and three children (aged 10, 8 and 5 respectively) were found dead in the hut of a relative in Selliampalayam village near Parambalur on November 19. It is alleged that on account of poverty the worker mixed insecticide in milk and gave it to his wife and three children and later drank it himself."¹ This is, for the author and many social scientists and development workers, the most important characteristic of the Indian situation today.

A 1975 announcement strikes a very different note: "We have met many challenges since we became free. And here is a record of our achievements :

- Food production has gone up from 4 crore 80 lakh tons in 1948-49 to over 10 crore 40 lakh tons in 1973-74.
- Number of villages electrified has increased from a mere 3000 before the beginning of the First Plan to over 1 lakh 62 thousand by Jan. 1975.
- Production of coal and coke increased from 2 crore 80 lakh tons in 1948-49 to 8 crore 12 lakh tons in 1973-74.
- Production of fertilisers increased from 18,000 tons in 1950-51 to 13 lakh 80 thousand tons in 1973-74.
- Area under irrigation has increased from 2 crore 8 lakh hectares in 1950-51 to 3 crore 15 lakh hectares in 1973-74.

1. "Economics and Politics of Garibi Hatao", Naya Prokash, Calcutta, 1973, pp. 2-3.

- Sugar produced in 1973-74 was nearly 40 lakh tons as against 10 lakh tons in 1948-49. Cotton cloth increased from 44 crore yards to 795 crore meters in 1973-74....Let us get on with the job of Nation Building."²

Quite a few writers follow this trend of thought and like to show, by their statistics, that, in the last few decades, agricultural production has almost doubled, while industrial production has more than trebled; the national income has also doubled in the same period. This is undoubtedly another dimension of the Indian situation.

It is therefore normal to ask: what is really happening in our country? Is India progressing?

The previous paragraphs indicate how much the present booklet on "The Indian Situation" continues and makes more concrete what was stressed in "The Development Debate". Writings on post-Independence fall into various categories. Some of them, portraying the sufferings of the poor, intend to "touch the hearts of the readers" to make them more generous; others, perhaps less emotional in tone, seek to deepen people's commitment in favour of the poor and the oppressed. Several publications are, on the other hand, inspired by clear political options and tend to substantiate by statistics the successes or failures of Government policies. A last category of writings, not always easily distinguishable from the previous one, accumulates data on the rate of economic growth in India as well as on existing poverty and inequalities; the authors consider such scientific studies essential to the evaluation of past policies and the framing of future ones. In such a context, to describe the Indian situation unavoidably means to continue the Development Debate.

Without losing sight of the actual progress of our country, we shall successively explore, in this booklet, two major themes that emerge from several studies on the Indian situation: the massive poverty and misery of our masses (1) and the

2. In "Bulletin of the Association of Scientific Workers of India", New Delhi, Vol. 5 no. 12, 1975, p. 96. Further data on our country's achievements can be found in the annual publication, "India 1974", "India 1975", Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi. The "Manorama Year Book", Manorama Publishing House, Kottayam, also publishes every year much valuable and up-to-date information. A Government pamphlet of 40 pages, "India Today, Basic Facts", sums up the data available in December 1972.

tremendous disparities that exist in society (II). Since we are much more accustomed to read about our achievements, this approach may surprise us. We have, however, felt that two objectives of our planning, the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequalities, have to be very seriously taken into account. An important growth is, undoubtedly, taking place in many sectors of our economy; but what is the meaning of all this development if the standard of life of the poor is not improved and the existing inequalities not reduced? If matters are getting better for a minority of our population and worse for the majority, should we be proud and happy? This is why we have decided to study the twin problems of poverty and inequalities in this booklet. Any economic growth and development has to be looked at in the light of consideration on the basic issues of poverty and inequalities. On the whole, this booklet tends to confirm and to illustrate the conclusions arrived at in "The Development Debate". As in the previous one, this second booklet also raises various questions that will be more deeply answered in the systematic analysis of our future publications.

Before proceeding any further, it might be good to add two preliminary remarks on the purpose and method of this essay and on the accuracy of statistical data.

While being an introduction to the study of poverty in India, this booklet, we hope, does not remain only at the level of dry statistics and abstract theories. It broadens our own experiences of poverty and injustice by pointing out, with the help of scientific information, how many of our countrymen suffer in the miserable conditions we observe around us. It even tries to help us understand better the lives of the poor, the unemployed, the Harijans, the tribals and other underprivileged sections of our society. It indirectly invites us to reflect on our standards of living and to compare them with those of the great majority of our people. In short, this booklet aims, among other things, at making us enter as deeply as possible into the life of the common man in India today. We, consequently, hope that this study will awaken us from our complacency and help us to realise how much the Indian situation, so intolerable and unjust, calls for an immediate and drastic action. Though a deepened understanding of the life of the common man matters much to us, the highly personal nature of such reflections has led us to be satisfied with occasional allusions in the text, itself; some of our appendices and the practical suggestions found in our questionnaire will, however, give ample scope for a greater personal exposure to, and more human understanding of, the Indian situation. We hope all of us will do our home-work!

Our last introductory remark concerns the reliability of statistics on economic matters. Economists and development

experts generally agree that allowance has to be made for a large margin of errors in existing data, especially in developing countries.³ Unfortunately this does not however imply, as some readers, shocked by the grim picture that emerges, are inclined to think, that the Indian situation is better than what statistics make it appear. In fact, most of the data found in this booklet are taken from, or quoted by, Government sources, which are evidently not interested in projecting a negative image of India. It should also be pointed out that the reliability of statistics varies according to their content. We can, therefore, conclude that, while sometimes lacking in accuracy and "giving the illusion of a precision that does not exist"⁴, statistics remain a useful means to broaden our experimental knowledge. The readers are, moreover, invited to constantly compare the findings of statistical studies with their own experiences and observations.

3. On this subject, see the extremely critical pages of G. Myrdal, "The Challenge of World Poverty", Penguin Books, 1971, pp, 263-68. Myrdal recommends the book of O. Morgenstern, "On the Accuracy of Economic Observations," 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 1965. On India, refer to A. N. Agarwal, "Indian Economy, Nature, Problems and Progress", Vikas Publishing House, 1975, ch. 5, "National Income : Measurement and Difficulties," pp. 49-61.

4. D. V. McGranahan, Director of the United Nations Research Institute of Social Development, quoted by Myrdal, op. cit., p. 267.

1. A LAND OF MASSIVE POVERTY AND MISERY

Visitors to India are struck by the appalling poverty and misery of the masses. The first impression, in almost any part of the country, is that of an ocean of poverty and stagnation with a few islands of prosperity and development. In the nation as a whole, there are undoubtedly a few pockets of prosperity—the areas of the Green Revolution in the States of Punjab and Haryana and elsewhere, along with certain industrial and/or residential centres,—but these remain enclaves which seem almost out-of-place in their surroundings. In India, one can never forget poverty and misery, except by becoming so accustomed to it that one does not notice it any more. It is, therefore, fitting to start our study by considering the type of life to which roughly half our population is reduced;⁵ all our achievements, investigated in further booklets, should not make us lose sight of this grim reality.

Standard of life is usually described by listing the goods and services which a person, a family, a group or class, or the average population of a particular country, enjoys at a given period. They are calculated by the purchasing power required to buy these goods and services. In the industrialized countries, the measurement of standard of life has reached a tremendous complexity and sophistication on account of all the goods and services available and of the various indicators and variables selected by economists to evaluate them. In the under-developed countries, however, the situation is so dismal, even after several years of planned development, that it is enough to study the availability of basic necessities to measure the standard of life of the masses. That is why, after a very brief note on our population and our growth rate, we shall first of all identify the "staggering magnitude"⁶ of India's poor. We shall then consider how much basic necessities of life such as food, drinking water, clothing and housing, health, education and employment, are available and within their reach. We shall finally observe how the incomes of the masses are so low that they live a life of indebtedness and dependency. This is the frightening picture of poverty in our country.

5. A simple, but illustrated and thought-provoking, description of the Indian reality is found in "Church and Social Justice", CISRS, Bangalore, 1975, pp. 5-18.

6. The expression is taken from Rajni Kothari, EPW, Bombay, Special Number, 1972, p. 1541.

Population Trends and Economic Growth

As our fifth booklet contains a more detailed study on "Population and Economic Growth", we shall, for the present, be satisfied with a few basic facts on the growth of population in India.⁷ Till 1921, the census figures show an irregular rise and fall of population and a very small annual growth rate, for example, between 1901 and 1921, population increased by only 0.27% annually. But after 1921, the year of the "Great Divide", we notice a rapid and uninterrupted increase, which was further accelerated after Independence. The 1951-61 decade was marked by a 21.6% increase, while the 1961-71 saw a still bigger rise of 24.8%. According to the latest statistics, the present population of India is around 604 million and increases by about 11 million a year, almost a million a month! This means that every year India has to feed an additional population corresponding to that of Nepal or Malaysia! At the present rate, our population will exceed 1 billion before 2000.

On the other hand, the growth rate of our national income was only about 1% per year before Independence. From then till 1974, the average annual growth rate in real national income (that is, at constant prices) has been about 4.1%. It should however be observed that our national income has greatly fluctuated, for 40% to 50% of it is contributed by agriculture, which remains, in turn, very dependent, on the weather. The situation, moreover, becomes tragic, when one takes into account our population growth and calculates our per capita income. At current (and rising!) prices, there has been an annual increase of 2.5% between 1948-49 and 1960-61, and of 14% between 1960-61 and 1973-74. At constant prices, however, the annual increase has been only 1.5% in the first decade, and 0.9% in the second one. Between 1960 and 1970, the rise has been only 0.5% per year. Ultimately, this means that the per capita income and, consequently, the standards of life, have increased very slowly since Independence. At 1960-61 prices, the annual per capita income in 1973-74 was only about Rs. 340 which works out to be about Rs 28 per month; at current prices, it was about Rs 850 per year or Rs 71 per month.⁸

7. See for example, Agarwal, *op. cit.* ch. 8, "Population-Basic Facts", pp. 95-114 and "India 1975", *op. cit.* p. 5ff.

8. See Agarwal, *op. cit.*, p. 62ff.

But what do these figures hide? How equally is the national income, and its increase, distributed? And what are the standards of life of various groups in India? To answer such questions, we, first of all, need to study the problem of poverty in our society.

The Staggering Magnitude of the Poor

Less than two years ago, the Indian Press announced this shocking news item: "The Minister of State for Planning Mr. Mohan Dharia, admitted in the Rajya Sabha today that two-thirds of the Indian population was living below the poverty line. In a written answer, the Minister said the monthly per capita private consumption of Rs 20 at 1960-61 prices was regarded as the minimum desirable level of consumption. People with less than this level of consumption were regarded as poor."⁹ In November 1972, the same minister had evaluated the percentage of 1964-65 to be 44% and 51% of the rural and urban population respectively.¹⁰ According to Mr. Dharia, there has therefore been a substantial increase in the number and percentage of people below the poverty line in the last decade!

Not Enough Food for a Normal Human Life

The expression "poverty line" was coined in the early sixties; it belongs to our political and economic jargon. It is a sort of yardstick to measure poverty in our country. It has been called the "bare minimum" for human existence, the "subsistence level". The conditions of life of our people are so desperate that the Central Government Pay Commission has defined the "poverty line" as "the minimum required diet for a moderate activity".¹¹ This diet provides the minimum amount of calories,

9. P.T.I., New Delhi, August 1, 1974.

10. P.T.I., New Delhi, November 29, 1972, quoted by Ajit Roy, op. cit., p. 5.

11. Awarwal, for example, writes: "To identify the poor in India, one has to use the criterion of minimum requirement of necessities. Of course, this will not meet the test of reasonable existence, much less of comfortable life, but it should provide what is essential for physical existence. It is in the light of these that almost all estimates of poverty in India are related to expenditure, mostly on food which generates 2,250 calories per capita per day. Again, it is this need to relate the minimum requirements of bare existence to the concept of poverty that our plans picture the poor with such phraseology as "the common man", "the

proteins and other nutrients, one needs, in India, to work normally;¹² we would like to emphasize that no other need, however important and basic, is included in the concept of "poverty line". Obviously, without this diet, one does not die suddenly, but one cannot exercise a normal human activity. In other words, no normal physical, psychological, intellectual and even spiritual life is possible "below the poverty line". It is with such a concept that statistics have to be understood; in our country, two or three, perhaps even four hundred million children and adults cannot study and work normally, for they are affected by malnutrition. They subsist "below the poverty line", in what Mark Twain has described as a "Reign of Terror"....¹³

A team of experts, appointed by the Planning Commission in 1962, concluded that this "minimum diet" represented Rs 240 a year or Rs 20 per month per person at 1960-61 prices. Since other experts further reduced this consumption level (see Table I), the minimum is usually said to be Rs 15-20 per month per person at 1960-61 prices. According to the 1972-73 price index, the "minimum diet" meant Rs 360-480 per year per person. Before the declaration of emergency in June 1975, it was about Rs 650-860 a year; now, at the end of March 1976, it is, according to the latest Government reports, around Rs 540-720 a year, or Rs 45-60 a month.¹⁴ All those who spend less than this amount for food are "below the conventional Indian poverty line"!

But what is the number of the poor in India? To find out, let us now consult those who have made specialized studies on this issue.

weaker sections" and the "less privileged". The poor can thus be described as those who are not able to meet the minimum requirements of physical life. Put in money terms this means: those people are poor who do not possess adequate purchasing power to buy as much food as can generate energy in their bodies equivalent to 2,250 calories per day." (op. cit., p. 90).

12. This minimum food requirements - 2,250 calories - is only: 15 ounces of food-grains, 3 of pulses, 4 of mill, 1.5 of sugar and 1.2 of oil... per day per person!

13. See appendix 3. Appendix 2 also speaks of the effects of malnutrition.

14. Published in "The Sunday Standard", April 2, 1976.

Poverty Studies in India

In our country, scientific studies on poverty started only in the early sixties¹⁵. From that time onward, however, various official bodies, such as the Ministry of Community Development, The Planning Commission, the RBI, the NCAER, and the NSS, were all involved in studying the standards of life of our people¹⁶. In the first years of the seventies, social scientists have thrown more light on the extent and degree of poverty in our country. The most outstanding macro-level surveys were made by P.D. Ojha, E.W. da Costa, B.S. Minhas, and Dandekar and Rath¹⁷. Several other studies concentrated on special poverty groups, mainly the landless labour groups¹⁸.

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15. For a short history of poverty studies in India, see the article of Dr. Amritananda Das, "Studying Poverty in Developing Nations: With Special Reference to India", in Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (ed.), "Effective Anti-Poverty Strategies", Bangkok, 1974. This paragraph owes much to Amritananda. See also the article of P. Bardhan, in "Poverty and Income Distribution in India", T. N. Srinivasan and P. K. Bardhan, Statistical Publishing Society, Calcutta, 1974.
 16. For these sources, consult: "Report of the Study Group on the Welfare of Weaker Sections of the Village Community", Ministry of Community Development, Government of India, 1962; "Perspective of Development, India 1961-76: Implications of Planning for a Minimum Level of Living", Perspective Planning Commission, Planning Commission, July 1962; P. D. Ojha and V.V. Bhatt, "Distribution of Income in the Indian Economy 1953-54 to 1956-57", Reserve Bank of India Bulletin, September 1962; "All India Rural Household Survey: Income, Investment and Saving", NCAER, New Delhi, 1965; "Mahalanobis Commission Report"
 17. These are the main publications: V. M. Dandekar and N. Rath, "Poverty in India". Indian School of Political Economy, Bombay. 1971; B. S. Minhas, "Planning and the Poor", New Delhi, 1974; A.J. Fonseca, "Challenge of Poverty in India", Vikas Publications, 1971, which contains articles of P. D. Ojha ("A Configuration of Indian Poverty"), E. W. da Costa ("A Portrait of Indian Poverty"), B.S. Minhas ("The Poor, the Weak and the Fourth Plan") and A.J Fonseca ("The Poverty Line for the Industrial Worker").
 18. A good bibliography of these studies can be found in T. N. Chandran, "Poverty-affected Groups in India", Trivandrum, 1972. Though their conclusions are sometimes challenged by other writers, we would like to draw attention to the two following articles: Pranab Bardhan, "Green Revolution and Agricultural Labourers", in EPW, July 1970, and Satish K. Arora, "Economic Growth, Social Justice and Political Stability", in EPW, July 1970.

*The Number of Poor*¹⁹

These various studies on poverty in India have tried to pinpoint the number of poor and to determine their regional as well as their rural and urban background. In spite of the limitations and even contradictions of their findings, "It goes to the credit of these authors to have focused their attention on one of the most crucial problems. They have succeeded in bringing out in unmistakable terms the fact that there exists widespread and absolute poverty in India, and that in spite of 25 years of planned development, a vast number of people continue to live in abject poverty and destitution"²⁰.

We give in Table I a synoptical view of the findings of the main studies, with each author's basic "criteria of poverty line"²¹.

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19. For an interesting summary, see Agarwal, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-94 and p. 33. In his article on "Poverty and income Distribution in India", *op. cit.*, Bardhan shows the limitations of the available data. Ajit Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11, and M. L. Dantwala, *EPW*, April 19, 1975, p. 662, refer to, and generally agree with, Bardhan's views.
 20. G. S. Bhalla, "Causes and Cures in Garibi Hatao", *Seminar* No 167, July 1973, p. 18.
 21. Table I is a simplified form of the table given by R. K. Sau, in *EPW Annual*, February 1972, page 371. Minhas has also estimated 173 million (52.4%) for 1956-57, 169 (50.2) for 1957-58, 159 (43.6) for 1961-62, 154.4 (39.3) for 1963-64, and Bardhan 174.4 (44.6) for 1963-64. Other experts and Government officials corroborate and agree with such data. The official Government document "Towards an Approach to the Fifth Plan" published in 1972, for example, states: "Economic development in the last two decades has resulted in an all-round increase in per capita income. The proportion of the poor...has slightly come down. Yet the absolute number of people below the poverty line today is just as large as it was two decades ago. And these people living in abject poverty constitute between two-fifths and one half of all Indian citizens." (Quoted in C.T. Kurien, "Poverty and Development", CLS, Madras, 1974, p. 14). A. N. Agarwal writes: "Roughly...one can say that the number of poor at present (1975) is much above 200 millions" (*op. cit.*, p. 91). In a 1975 publication, the NCAER "estimated that the proportion of the poor in the total rural population declined from 74.6 per cent in 1968-69 to 72.4 per cent in 1969-70 and further to 68.5 per cent in 1970-71, or in absolute terms from 307.7 million to 305.3 million and further to 295.7 million during the same period." The reviewer of these findings considers them too optimistic! (*EPW*, September 20, 1975, p. 1493).

TABLE I

Estimates of Poverty in India

(in millions and percentages)

	1960-61			1967-68		
	Rural Pop.	Urban Pop.	Total Pop.	Rural Pop.	Urban Pop.	Total Pop.
Ojha	184.2 (51.8)	6 (7.6)	190.2 (44)	289 (70)		
Bardhan	131.1 (38)			220.5 (53)		
Minhas	164.4 (46)			154 (37.1)		
Dandekar- Rath	135 (40)	42 (50)	177 (41)	166.4 (40)	49 (50)	215.5 (41)

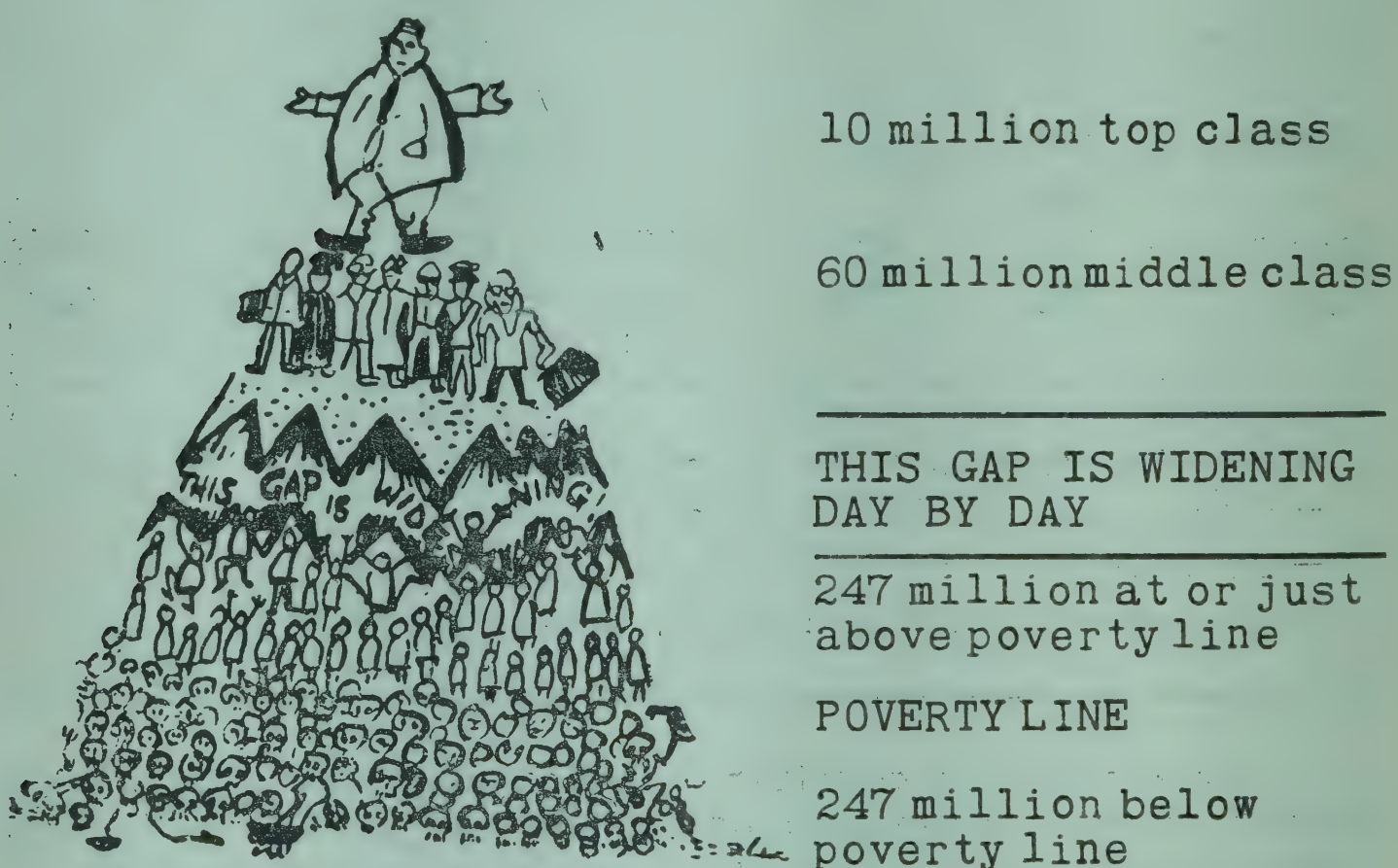
Criteria of poverty line (at 1960-61 prices; per month per person)

- Ojha: Rural: Rs 15-18; Urban: Rs 8-11;
- Bardhan: Rural: Rs 15; Minhas: Rural: Rs 17;
- Dandekar-Rath: Rural: Rs 15; Urban: Rs 22.50.

If we carefully consider these figures, which we will not repeat in words, we can notice the complete agreement of these scholars on the massive character of poverty in India. If one looks at the different criteria of poverty—Rs 15 to 18 a month for the countryside, and Rs 22.50 for the cities—it is, moreover, evident that none of these writers can be blamed for being too generous: they are, undoubtedly, dealing with "bare minimums"! This is why experts are sometimes told in seminars that it is impossible to live with the amount they budget for the poverty line.

A few words should however be added about the scholars' different estimates of the number and percentage of the poor. How do we explain the differences? The greatest difference lies between Ojha's and Dandekar-Rath's studies of the urban population in 1960-61: the former classifies only 7.6% of our population as below poverty line, while the latter find 50% of our people in that category. The explanation is simple: Ojha calculates Rs 8 to 11 as minimum monthly expenses for food—

our "common sense" protest!—, while Dandekar- Rath take Rs 22.50 as minimum. The other differences in the final results are due to various statistical adjustments which are not mentioned in Table I and which we better leave to experts. The estimates of the number and percentage of people below the poverty line also greatly differ because there are so many people at and just below and above the poverty line, that the slightest change in the situation and/or in our criteria of evaluation, transfers millions of people from one category to another. We could almost say, with a tinge of humour, that to budget an additional daily cup of tea in our financial estimate of the poverty line, would bring several millions into the category of the poor!



A Land of Massive Poverty and Misery. 87.6% of the population, at, below or just above Poverty line!

Two other facts are worth pointing out. As can be seen from Table I, the great majority of the poor is in rural areas; this is not surprising since 80% of our population live in villages. There are, moreover, great disparities in the percentage of people below poverty line in the different states of India. The statistics of Mr. Ojha are given, by way of example, in Table II²².

22. P.D. Ojha: "A Configuration of Indian Poverty: Inequality and Levels of Living." Reserve Bank of India Bulletin, XXIV,

TABLE II

Percentage of Rural People below Minimum Level of living drawing Rs 15 per month at 1960-61 prices

State	1960-61	1967-68
Andhra Pradesh	47.41	72.11
Assam	13.78	53.02
Bihar	37.64	80.50
Gujarat	25.01	63.97
Haryana	—	55.74
Jammu & Kashmir	20.53	42.02
Kerala	56.72	77.71
Madhya Pradesh	47.16	71.02
Maharashtra	40.41	67.61
Mysore	34.20	76.29
Orissa	68.88	82.30
Punjab	13.56	49.98
Rajasthan	33.50	54.90
Tamilnadu	46.45	71.88
Uttar Pradesh	39.47	81.01
West Bengal	22.14	84.12
All-India	38.03	73.24

Is Poverty Increasing?

We still have to explore further on poverty in India. Have the number and percentage of people below poverty line increased since 1960-61? And is the standard of life of the poor improving or becoming worse?

Let us try to answer such questions with the help of experts. Table I shows there is no complete agreement among the scholars. Dandekar and Rath think that the situation has remained the same for both the rural and urban population. Minhas is the only one to hold that the situation has improved; he states that the percentage of rural poverty has fallen from 52.4% in 1956-57 to 37% in 1967-68. Ojha arrives at opposite conclusions: a sharp increase from 51.8% in 1960-61 to 70% in 1967-68; Bardhan favours an increase from 38% to 58% for the same group and year. As already seen, the opinion of

Mr. Dharia goes along these lines. Agarwal thus sums up the estimates and projections of the Planning Commission: "The number of poor.... has been estimated at 30 per cent of the population in 1973-74 or in absolute number at 173 millions. The Planning Commission has also made projections till 1985-86 on the assumption that the share (13.4 per cent) of those at the bottom 30 per cent of the population in the total private consumption remains the same. With this assumption the number of poor will be 190 million in 1978-79, 205 million in 1983-84 and 211 million in 1985-86."²³

C.T. Kurien even argues that, besides an increase in the number of the poor, their standard of life is deteriorating: "Two decades of planned economic development have led to the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer. An extensive statistical study on "Poverty in India" (by V.M. Dandekar and N. Rath) has documented it also. After examining the decade of the sixties the study came to the conclusion: "The gains of development have remained largely confined to the upper middle class and the richer sections constituting the top 40 per cent of the population... The per capita consumption of the lower middle and poorer section constituting the bottom 40 per cent of the urban population declined by as much as between 15 and 20 per cent.... In the rural areas the consumption of the 20 per cent poorest population increased by less than 2.0 per cent in seven years from 1960-68 and the consumption of the poorest 5 per cent actually declined by about one per cent. It must be mentioned that these comparisons are about the relative shares in consumption of different income groups and that they do not necessarily say anything definite about the actual income or consumption levels of any section of the population. But there is independent evidence to show that over the past two decades, the poorer sections of society, agricultural labourers in many parts of the country, for example, have become worse off in an absolute sense also, considering the fact that whatever gains they may have made in terms of monetary earnings have been more than neutralised by the rise in prices".²⁴

23. op. cit., p. 91

24. op. cit., pp. 14-15.



It seems that we can, therefore, conclude with Ajit Roy: "While any definite judgment on the varying estimates of the dimensions of poverty in India on any time scale must wait..., there is already a large measure of agreement, if not a total unanimity, about the trend of an absolute growth (in terms of numbers of population below the poverty line) and relative deepening of poverty (at least for the bottom fractile group) during the last decade"²⁵.

Rising Prices Mostly Hit the Poor

It might be good to comment here on rising prices and on their consequences on the poor.

The movement of wholesale prices gives us an account of the tremendous price increases in the past few years. As we can see in Table III, the prices of food articles have risen more sharply than those of other commodities. The increase of prices

TABLE III

Index numbers of wholesale prices²⁶ (Base: 1961-62 = 100)

Item	1969-70	70-71	71-72	72-73	73-74	March 74	June 75	Feb 76
Food articles :								
- Total	198	203	210	239	295	320	365	310
- Food grains	208	206	214	247	296	331		
All Commodities								
	171	181	188	207	254	283	310	285

25. op. cit., pp. 10-11. The "bottom fractile group" is the lowest 5% of our population.

26. "India 1975", op. cit., p. 135, table 11.7. The data for 1975 and 1976 are

has been continuous, but a very sharp acceleration has taken place since 1972. The prices — those of food articles in particular — have, however, considerably fallen since the promulgation of National Emergency in June 1975, thus bringing a long-awaited and welcome relief to the common man.

The rate of inflation was in fact so high that the real earnings—the total earnings less the price increases—of industrial workers have not increased between 1962 and 1971. This fact was acknowledged by the Labour Minister K.V. Raghunatha Reddy in the Rajya Sabha on August 24, 1974. The Minister declared: "Though the money earnings of industrial workers increased in 1971 by as much as 81 points compared with those for 1962 (base 1961 = 100), their real earnings in fact declined by one point, from 103 in 1962 to 102 in 1971....The All-India consumer price index for this period (1962-71) had risen from 103 to 183"²⁷. Since the rate of inflation was much greater after 1972, we cannot expect this situation to have improved afterwards, at least not before the declaration of the emergency. We can, therefore, see that the organised section of the working class, which possesses a certain bargaining power and which represents only 4% to 5% of the working population, did not succeed in improving their standards of living. What to say, then, about the great majority of the workers—the agricultural labourers, the small and marginal farmers, the small artisans—who are generally unorganised and left without any bargaining power?²⁸ The poor have to face the rising prices

Government statistics published by "The Sunday Standard", April 11, 1976. This is the weight of different items in the index numbers of wholesale prices: food articles (41) (of which food grains 14), liquor and tobacco (2.5), fuel, power, light & lubricants (6.1), industrial raw material (12), chemicals (0.7), machinery and transport equipment (7.9), manufactures (29) (See "India 1975", p. 135, tables 11.7).

27. See also "India 1975", p. 293, table 21.3.

28. Agarwal shows that the average income of agricultural labour households has actually fallen between 1950-51 and 1956-57. The real wages of male workers between 1950-51 and 1964-65, and even afterwards, have followed the same pattern, (op. cit., pp. 360-62). Certain experts, however, contend that the real wages of about 30% of the agricultural labourers - that is, those of Punjab, Haryana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat - have improved between 1956 and 1972 (See for example A. V. Jose, "Trends in real wage Rates of Agricultural Labourers", in EPW, March 30, 1974, pp. A-25-30).

with their meagre and rather static wages. They are those who suffer the most from inflation. It is, therefore, likely that the extent and intensity of poverty have increased till June 1975.

We began this essay on the "Staggering Magnitude of the Poor" by Dharia's 1974 evaluation of their number at two-thirds of the Indian population. As it has been shown in the previous pages, experts usually give lower figures for the period till 1967-68, but conclude that the number of poor, if not the percentage, has increased afterwards. Taking into account the economic crisis, the poor harvests and the rising prices after 1972, one may wonder whether Dharia was far from the truth... On account of the recent good harvest and the falling prices, the situation might be slightly better now. Yet, it seems reasonable to conclude that 40% to 60% of our people—240 to 360 million!—are today below the poverty line and cannot spend, at current prices in April 1976, Rs 45 to 60 a month or Rs 1.50 to 2 a day on food. And these figures and standards of life are so low that we almost feel ashamed to have tried to number the poor according to them; even if nobody was below the poverty line, the Indian situation would still be unbearable!

The Standard of Life of the Poor

People who cannot afford enough food to lead a normal human life cannot be expected to enjoy many other goods and services. Let us, however, conclude our essay on food and briefly consider the other basic necessities of life or the essential components of the standards of life of a nation. We shall limit ourselves to a minimum of information on health and education, for special booklets will be published on these topics later on.

Hunger and Malnutrition

According to the Indian definition of poverty, all the poor we have been talking about suffer from malnutrition. The following statistics on malnutrition should not, therefore, surprise us: "Malnutrition is one of the major factors, responsible for the high mortality and morbidity rates in India. The National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad, reports that 65 per cent of India's toddlers (age group 1 to 5) in the lower income levels, suffer from moderate malnutrition and 18 per cent from severe malnutrition. In March 1973 the Health Ministry said in the Lok Sabha, that about 60 million children of this group are

badly undernourished. The reason is not 'protein starvation' as some UN reports suggested but overall calory starvation. It is estimated that nearly one million toddlers die every year in India. Although this group (1 to 5 years) constitutes only 16.5 per cent of the population, it accounts for 40 per cent of the total deaths. Large numbers of children in this group, if they survive childhood starvation, are doomed to retarded physical and mental development."²⁹ For the Indian masses, food is the most needed and urgently required medicine.

In his analysis of "The Food Problem", Agarwal points out that the shortage of foodgrains, mostly affects the poorer section of the population³⁰. The author, then, speaks of "qualitative deficiency" and "high prices" and thus describes the life of the poor: "The prices...are so high that an overwhelming number of people do not get even small quantities of food for their physical existence. Nutritive foods are simply out of their reach. They do not succeed in compensating even partly the deficiency of nutritive foods by taking adequate quantities of foodgrains. Most Indians are thus not only undernourished, but they are also underfed. These people always live on the verge of hunger, starvation, and even death."³¹ Agarwal finally concludes: "The inadequacy of foodgrains in general and its near non-availability to the poorer sections has seriously injured the health of mothers and children. Besides, the efficiency of workers and the span of their working lives have been adversely affected. In concrete terms it means fewer working hours, low speed in work, early fatigue, and a shorter working life. Apart from injury to the physical health of workers, there has been an unfavourable effect on the intellectual growth of these people. As a result of all this, production in the country has remained at a low level and is of low quality. Thus the people of this country have been trapped in a vicious circle: Indians are poor and hungry because they produce less, and their production is less because they are hungry and their food is unblanced."³²

29. "Manorama Year Book 1975", op. cit., p, 427. Once again, for the effect of malnutrition, we refer the readers to appendices 2 and 3.

30. Op. cit., p. 394 Table VII gives statistics on the shortage of foodgrains in India. On "The Food Problem", see for example, Agarwal, op. cit., pp. 393-411 and Ram Das, "Planning India's Food and Nutrition", Lucknow Publishing House and I.S.P.C.K., 1972.

31. Ibid., p. 395.

32. Ibid., pp. 396-7

Drinking Water and Sanitation

According to "India 1975" 83% of the total urban population had been provided by March 1974, with, drinking water supply, and 38% with a sewage system. "Of the 5.76 lakh villages, about 28,000 with a total population of 1.90 crores (about 4.3 per cent of the total rural population) had been provided with pipe water supply up to March 1974. Of the remaining villages, about 4.55 lakhs have some kind of water supply like hand pumps, conserved wells and springs, but in about 1.16 lakh villages water is not available within a depth of 50 feet or a distance of one mile".³³ The report does not even speak of a sanitation system for the rural population. Safe drinking water and sanitation are other most urgently needed medicines for the Indian masses!

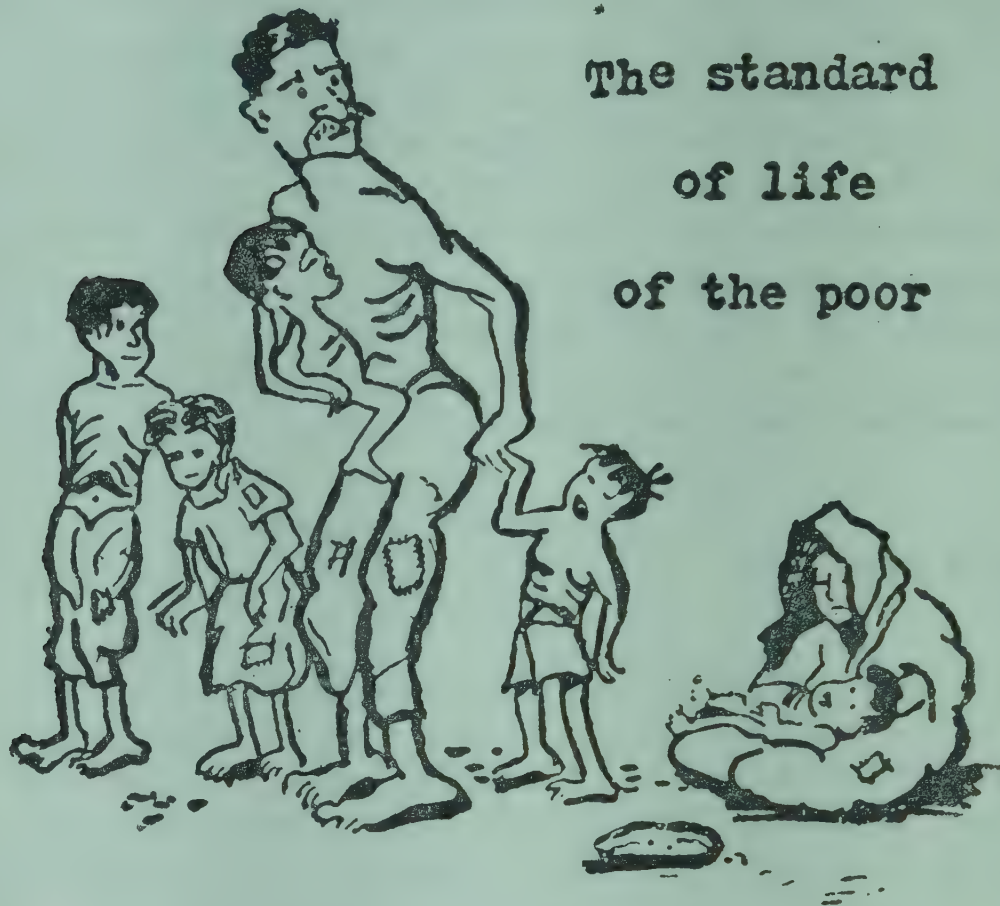
Clothing and Housing

In November 1975, the "Economic and Political Weekly" published a thought-provoking editorial on "More Cloth for the Rich?". Besides its views on employment, the review had this to say about clothing: "Cloth is a basic necessity of life. At the same time, there are varieties and varieties of cloth, only some of which can be produced at a price which is within the reach of the vast majority of the country's population.... Cloth production by the mills was 4.316 million metres in 1974 compared to 4,587 million metres in 1965 and 4,616 in 1960. As a result, despite higher production in the powerloom and handloom sectors, per capita availability of cotton cloth in the country has declined continuously from 14.7 meters in 1961 to 13.6 meters in 1970. and to 12.9 meters in 1974. This is not the whole story, however. Within the declining aggregate output, the proportion of the coarse and lower-medium varieties - by and large the varieties required by the poorer section of the population - has come down from 49.4 per cent in 1961 to 42.3 per cent in 1974, while that of fine and superfine cloth has gone up from 8.4 per cent to 12.3 per cent. In absolute terms, the production of coarse and lower medium varieties fell by as much as 27 per cent between 1961 and 1974, whereas that of fine and superfine varieties went up by 34 per cent... The result (of present policies) can only be a further decline in the per capita availability of the kinds of cloth required by the poor..."³⁴ While

33. Op. cit., p. 85.

34. EPW, vol. X No. 48, 1975, p. M-105 On this subject, see also Table VII.

population increases alarmingly, the production of cheap clothing for the poor decreases! This explains the type of clothing we see people wearing...or not wearing!



The housing situation in our country is beyond all imagination. "Though no precise data are available about the shortage of housing in the country, the 1971 Census placed the shortage at 1.45 crore units; 29 lakhs in urban areas and 1.16 crores in rural areas. A recent study by the National Buildings Organisation showed that, after taking into account the increase in households owing to the natural growth of population and net addition to the housing stock during 1972-74, the housing shortage on the eve of the Fifth Plan was estimated at 1.56 crore units; 38 lakhs in urban areas and 1.18 crores in rural areas. According to the 1971 Census, the usable housing stock was 8.25 crore units (6.84 crores in 1961) for the use of the entire population of 54.8 crores divided into about 9.7 crore households."³⁵ These statistics show an increasing deficit in building units. According to the union Minister for Works, Housing and Urban Development, Mr. K. Gujral the delay in building houses in the urban centres was much higher, that is

35. "India 1975", op. cit., p. 305'

about 12 million units in 1969, and the deficit has grown since then, with the consequence that 20 to 25% of the population in big urban centres live as "pavement dwellers". According to the same minister, India is building only two units per thousand per year in the urban areas and 0.44 in the rural areas, while the UN recommendation is 10 house units per thousand per year.³⁶ Experts, moreover, conclude that the problem of housing has to be seen in the context of the poverty of our people: "There is a housing threshold, a point along the income distribution curve below which it is not possible to provide housing..."³⁷

Health

The institutional growth of our health system is impressive and has undoubtedly resulted in vastly improved health standards. Table IV gives accurate information on the increased number of both institutions and trained personnel.

TABLE IV
Development of the Health System³⁸

	At the time of Independence	in 1971
Doctors	46,000	137,000
Nurses & midwives	12,000	88,000
Auxiliary Nurses		54,000
Health Inspectors	750	32,000
No. of Hospital Beds	113,000	300,000
No. of dispensaries	1,807	5,195

36. "Housing for our Millions", in "Illustrated Weekly of India", March 1972, pp. 7-10.

37. Alfred P. Van Huyck, quoted in EPW, Jan. 25, 1975, p. 115.

38. For the Health Situation at the time of Independence, see "Report of Health Survey and Development Committee", vol. I, Government of India, Delhi, p. 15. For 1971, see "Pocket Book on Health Statistics", Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Planning, Delhi, 1973, p. 25, and "India 1975", op. cit., pp. 78-81.

These data concern only "Western medicine". If we take "traditional medicine" into account, we must add 195 hospitals, 9 dispensaries, and 155,831 "institutionally" and "non-institutionally" qualified ayurvedic practitioners. These statistics show a striking progress. The number of doctors has practically trebled and that of nurses and midwives has increased more than 7 times. Since Independence, 54,000 auxiliary nurses have been trained. A whole network of Primary Rural Health Centres—5200 in March, 1974, with 32,000 sub-centres, has been created. Concrete results can also be shown. The death rate has come down from 27.4 per thousand in 1949-50 to 15 per thousand in 1971, while life expectancy at birth has increased from 32 years to 50 years. Definite progress has also been made in the control of communicable diseases like malaria, smallpox, filaria, tuberculosis, and trachoma³⁹.

And yet, our health standards are still extremely low and the great majority of our population, very vulnerable. The mortality rate, 15.1 per thousand, is considered high, and life expectancy at birth is much greater for the rich than for the poor. In spite of all our health campaigns, communicable diseases remain rampant. In 1973 for example, we had 1,498,961 cases of malaria, 34,972 of cholera and 75,904 of smallpox. Out of the 15 million people in the world who are affected by blindness on account of trachoma, 4 million are Indian; 60 to 80% of these cases were preventable. In our country, there are moreover 9 to 10 million victims of goitre and about 20 million of filaria, while the cases of active T.B. and of leprosy are numbered to 8 and 3 million respectively⁴⁰. But, why does such a situation still prevail after all our efforts and investments in men and money?

It should, first of all, be pointed out that the miserable health standards of our masses actually reflect the overall conditions of life which we have previously described. How can we expect people who subsist below the poverty line and suffer from malnutrition, to be in good health? How can the illclad, the homeless, those who live without safe drinking water and proper sanitation, avoid diseases? Miserable health standards almost unavoidably constitute a part and parcel of the life of the poor. To be born poor usually means to be born or to become unhealthy.

The very orientation of our health system, which we shall study more in depth in our tenth booklet, also explains the poor

39. For more details, see "India 1975", op. cit., pp. 78-81.

40. "Manorama Year Book 1975", op. cit., pp. 425-27.

health conditions of the masses, 80% of our doctors and 90% of our hospital beds are at the disposal of the urban population which represents only 20% of our total population. Since Independence, about 25,000 doctors left India to work abroad, while 25,000 others remain more or less unemployed in our cities. According to the Ministry of Health, most of the investments of our Five Year Plans go for the building of sophisticated hospitals and the training of doctors, both of which hardly serve our rural population; 3/4th of the state budget for health is also spent on the running expenses of more or less the elitist institutions, while only 1/4th is directly made use of for the real needs of the masses⁴¹. In the Fourth Plan, for example, only Rs 700 million, out of the total Rs 3,610 million for health, was allocated for rural areas⁴². Less than 1/5th of our total health outlay was budgeted for the already less favoured 4/5th of our population! As a result of such factors, 50-60% of our rural population remains without basic medical facilities. How much can each of our 5,200 Primary Health Centres, most often poorly staffed, financed and equipped, serve about 100,000 villagers? and how much can each of our 32,000 sub-centres, still worse off, serve a population of more than 15,000 people?

The general standards of life of our people and the overall organisation of our health system, therefore, explain, to a great extent, the miserable health standards of our people.

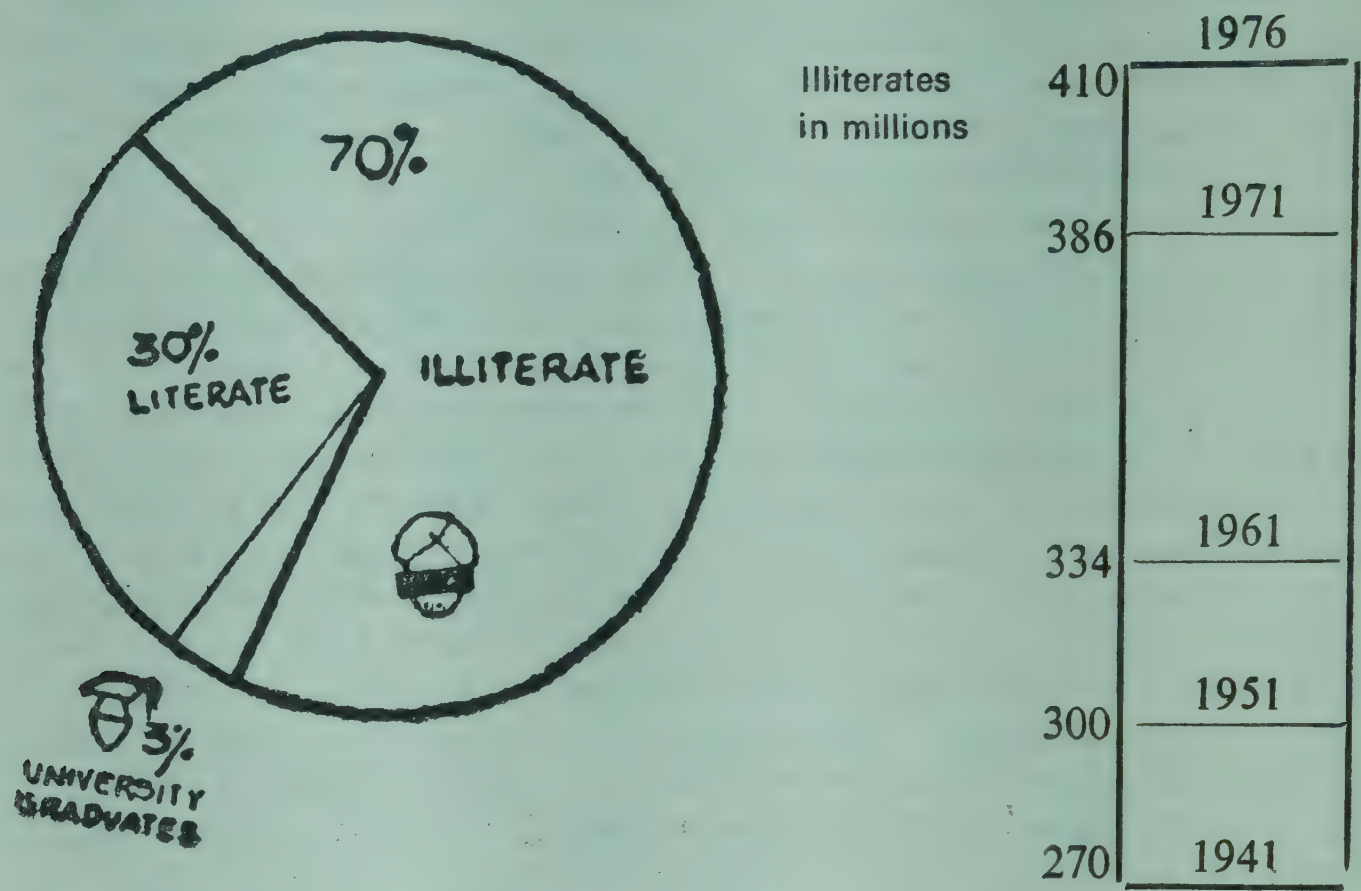
Education

The 1971 Census revealed the most striking feature of our educational system: more than two decades after Independence, only 29.3% of our population was literate. In 1975, the literacy rate was estimated at about 32.1%⁴³. This means that, in absolute figures, the total number of illiterates has been constantly growing: from 270 million in 1941, to 300 and 334 million in 1951 and 1961 respectively, and further to 386 and 410 million in 1971 and 1976⁴⁴. An increase of 140 million in 35 years. In the last decade, there has been an increase of almost 6 million per year! "It is (therefore) a sad commentary

41. For these statistics on health, see "Report of the Study Group on Hospitals", Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Planning, New Delhi, 1968, pp. 18-20.

42. D.L. Surendra, "Health Care in a Consumer Society," in "Pin" vol. 1, no. 1, 1974, p. 4.

on our development plans that our progress in literacy should be read as progress in illiteracy"⁴⁵.



The considerable increase in the number of illiterates in India is, first of all, due to our inability to provide school facilities to our children. In spite of an impressive growth in the number of schools, teachers and students, nearly 20% of our children do not go to school at all⁴⁶. What is much worse is the fact that about 50% of the children who join school leave it in the first standard itself, while 60% and 75% abandon it

43. T.A. Mathias; "Mass Education, Its Importance to India", in "New Frontiers in Education", vol. 5, no. 3, August 1975, p. 25. This is obviously a national average. In several states and union territories, the picture is even more gloomy: in 1971 the literacy rate was only 18.58% in Jammu Kashmir, and 19% in Bihar & Rajasthan, and 21.70% in U.P. ("India 1975", op. cit., p. 52, table 5.4). The all India literacy rate for women was only 18.70% and fell to 12.9% in rural areas (ibid., p. 52, and "Manorama Year Book 1975", op. cit., p. 265).

44. "Manorama Year Book 1975", op. cit., p. 423. The 1976 figure is obtained by taking 68% of our actual population of 604 millions.

45. Ibid. p. 423.

46. For exact figures on the increase of primary schools and teachers and on enrolment rates, see "India 1975", op. cit., p. 48, table 5.1. For a more detailed study on enrolment refer to "Education in the Fifth Five Year Plan", Government of India, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Delhi, 1972. Our twelfth booklet will study education in India; it will suggest meaningful changes and alternatives.

before standards V (age group 6 to 11) and VIII (age 14) respectively⁴⁷. The rate of drop outs is, therefore, extremely high! Since 3 to 4 years of schooling are required for lasting literacy—without this minimum, children fall back into illiteracy—, we can, therefore, conclude that our educational system fails to teach how to read and write almost 70% of our children. This sad situation openly violates our Constitution (article 45) which declares: “The state shall endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years”.

In fact, the problem of illiteracy has many other facets and has to be considered in a broader perspective. The financial outlay for education of our Five Year Plans is the first relevant factor. While there has been, in absolute terms, a remarkable increase in the budget for education—from 153 crores in the First Plan to 1726 crores in the Fifth one, the percentage has progressively come down—from 8.7% in the First Plan to 4.6% in the last one⁴⁸. The distribution of these finances to various branches of education is a second factor of great importance. Table V shows the share of various sectors in the total

TABLE V

Distribution of Expenditure on Education

	1st Plan	2nd Plan	3rd Plan	1966-69	4th Plan 69-74	5th Plan 74-79
Elementary Education including pre-school	56%	35%	30%	20%	28.5%	43%
Secondary Education	13%	19%	18%	16%	14.4%	17%
University Education	9%	18%	15%	25%	22.3%	20%
Miscellaneous	9%	10%	16%	15%	19.6%	
Technical	13%	18%	21%	25%	15.2%	
Total in crores	153	273	589	321.5	822.66	1726

47. J.P. Naik & Syed Nurullah, “A Student’s History of Education in India 1800-1973”, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 455-56. One can therefore see how misleading is the 80% enrolment rate!

48. Ibid., p. 479,

educational budget of each Plan⁴⁹. We can notice that the percentage allocated to primary education has constantly and considerably decreased from 1951 to 1969—from 56% to 20%! while those of secondary and still more of University education have increased from 13% and 9% to 16% and 25% respectively. These figures reveal both the little importance given to literacy in our Plans till 1969 and the elitist character of our educational system. In spite of educated unemployment, more and more money was poured into University education because of various pressures exercised by the higher classes of our society on the Government. It is highly fortunate that this trend has been reversed in the Fourth and Fifth Plans. In fact, the Planning Commission has accepted 97% as its enrolment target in primary education in 1978-79.⁵⁰ We rejoice at this priority and at the greater financial outlay for primary education. It should however be observed that even the realisation of this 97% enrolment target, which seems a rather impossible dream at present, will remain rather meaningless if the high percentage of drop outs, mainly due to poverty, does not also considerably fall. And this fact brings us to a third relevant factor in the struggle against illiteracy: namely, the need for concrete policies to wipe out poverty, inequalities and oppression in our country. Otherwise we cannot prevent drop outs and banish illiteracy. The eradication of illiteracy cannot be done in isolation. Besides these measures, a meaningful literacy policy would have to pay much more attention to adult education, which has so far been neglected. These are some of the key issues that have to be taken into account in the struggle against illiteracy.

As our present concern is to describe the standard of life of the poor in India, we will conclude this short section on education. With 410 million illiterates in our land, to speak of anything else would be a luxury.

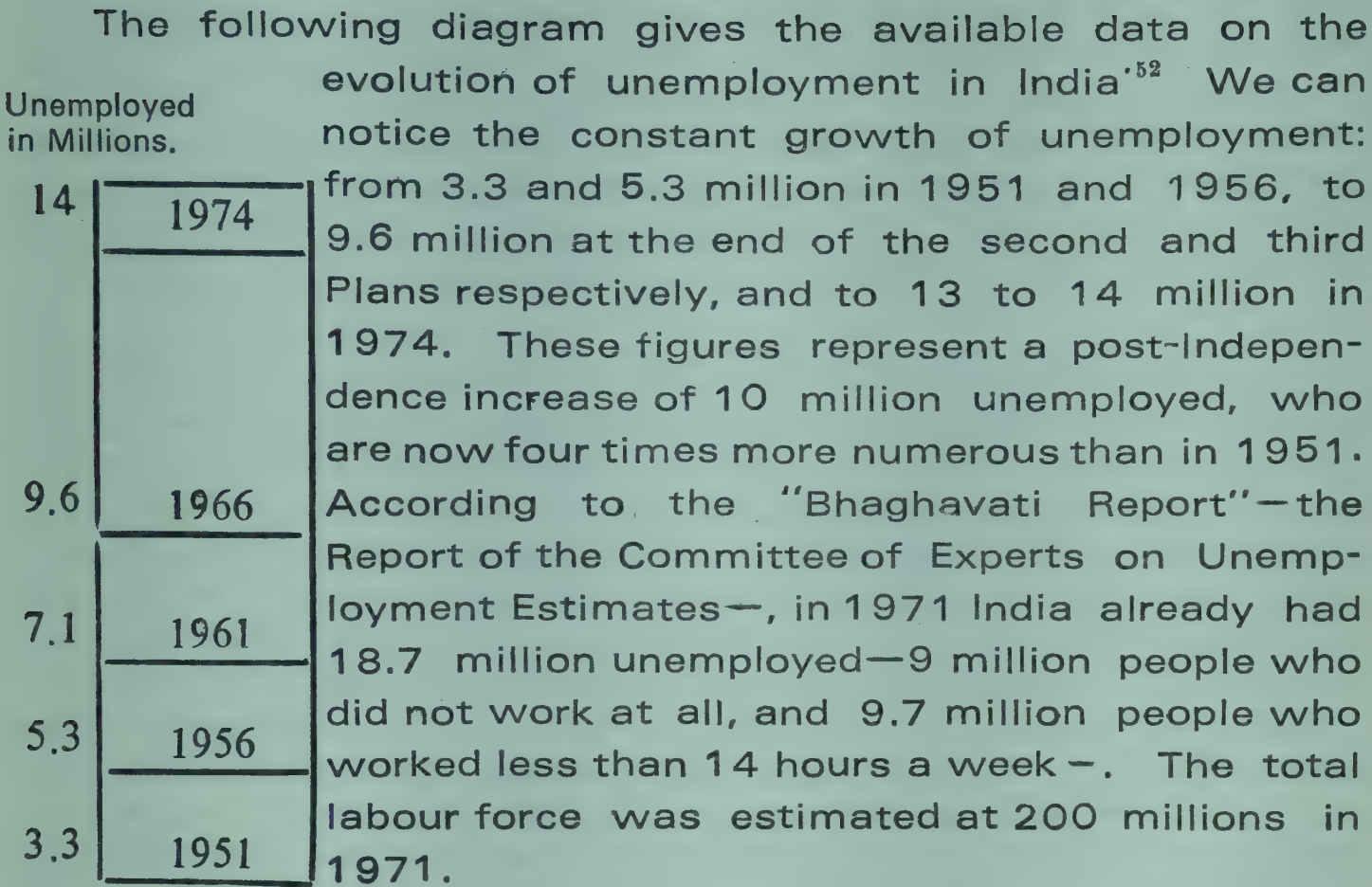
Unemployment

Unemployment is undoubtedly one of the most serious problems of our country. "Yet, strangely enough, we do not

49. Planning Commission, Working Paper on Education submitted to the Central Advisory Board of Education. The figures for the Fifth Plan are taken from "Draft Fifth Five Year Plan", Government of India. Planning Commission, Delhi, 1973.

50. "Draft Fifth Five Year Plan".

have precise estimate of the magnitude of the problem.”⁵¹ All experts, therefore, emphasize the unreliability of statistics in this field. Since the problem is extremely complex, we shall be satisfied here with a few remarks on general, rural and educated unemployment.



In underdeveloped countries like India, one has also to speak of various forms of underemployment, especially in rural areas. According to studies conducted under the auspices of the Ministry for Labour by the First and Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committees, male casual workers were employed for about 200 and 197 days in 1951 and 1956 respectively, while women had then to be satisfied with 134 and 141 days⁵³ The

51. S. Kannappam and J.S. Uppal, “Unemployment In India”, in “India’s Economic Problems”, J.S. Uppal (ed.), New Delhi, 1975, p. 220 for more details, see : Ruddar Datt and K.P.M. Sundaram, “Indian Economy”, New Delhi, 1972 ; Alak Gosh, “Indian Economy. Its Nature and Problems”, Calcutta, 1971; Agarwal, op. cit. pp. 143-162; and “Report of the Committee of Experts on Unemployment Estimates” Government of India, Planning Commission 1973.

52. Source: RBI Bulletin, December, 1969, and Fourth Five Year Plan, A draft outline, pp 106-108; see Agarwal, op. cit. p. 148.

53. These data are given by C.B. Namoria, “Agricultural problems of India”, Allahabad, 1966, p. 227.

Committee of Experts on Unemployment Estimates maintain that the number of "Severly underemployed"—The NSS has defined as "Severly underemployed" those who work less than 28 hours a week or roughly less than 6 months a year. while those who work more than 6 months a year or between 29 hours and 42 hours a week are called "moderately underemployed" - came down from 14.72% in 1958-59 to 9.85% in 1961-62.⁵⁴ In its mid-term appraisal of the Fourth Five Year Plan, the Planning Commission stated in 1972: "The incidence of seasonal unemployment and of underemployment is as heavy as before. It is, perhaps, heavier, than before, except in some parts of the country where the Green Revolution has achieved significant success."⁵⁵ These few facts suffice to help us realise how acute is the problem of underemployment in rural areas.

Agarwal thus sum up much of the available data on educated unemployment: "A rough measure of the educated unemployment can be had from the figures of employment exchanges which register job seekers in urban areas where educated unemployed generally reside. But here a word of caution is called for about the reliability of these figures. A sample survey in 1968 conducted by the Directorate-General of Employment and Training, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation showed that as many as 42.3 per cent persons were already employed and 7.0 per cent were students among the registrants at the time of survey. It has also been estimated that about 50 per cent of unemployed persons do not register themselves with employment exchanges. This survey has further revealed that about 3.6 per cent of the job seekers on the live register of employment exchanges belong to rural areas.

Assuming that the estimates of employment exchanges still hold good, the number of educated job seekers was 40.32 lakhs out of the total registered which stood at 83.54 at the end of June 1974. Thus about 50 per cent of the unemployed in urban areas are educated persons. The number of educated unemployed persons has been increasing from year to year. During two years preceding June 1974, the number increased by about 14 lakhs."⁵⁶

In spite of their unreliability, these figures give us a certain idea of the backlog of unemployment in our country. It has

54. Op. cit., 1973, p. 10.

55. "The Fourth Plan Mid-Term Appraisal", Planning Commission, 1972, p. 727.

56. Op. cit., pp. 155-56.

moreover been estimated that between 1972 and 1986, there will be 65 million more job-seekers in India!⁵⁷

We can therefore conclude with Agarwal: "To conclude, it is really unfortunate that nobody in India, not even the Planning Commission, knows how many are unemployed and how much of underemployment exists in the country...Remembering that in this field it is not the statistics that are involved but human beings, one realises how grave the situation is. The work of figure collection has started after the recommendations of the Committee of Experts on Employment' But need we take more than a quarter of a century to begin with this work which ought to have been the first item of planning?"⁵⁸ Though he is less severe for the last Plan, the author thus criticizes our policies: "It is obvious that in the five-year plans employment has not figured prominently, much less as a key objective which it should have been in a labour-abundant economy like that of India. All along, emphasis has been on employment as of secondary importance....It is, therefore, no surprise if one finds that unemployment in the country is on the increase."⁵⁹ Can we imagine the implications of such a problem for the national economy and for the life of the poor?

Rural Indebtedness and Dependency

Rural indebtedness portrays another dimension of the life of the poor. As Agarwal points out, "Indian agriculturists undergo debts....for non-productive purposes. They contract loans to meet such consumption needs as family expenditure on consumption, performance of social functions connected with marriage, birth and death, litigation, etc. Since these loans contribute nothing to production, it becomes impossible to provide for their repayment. As a result, such debts go on increasing from generation to generation."⁶⁰ The rural masses, heavily indebted, therefore, live in constant dependency. This, often, leads them to be subject in various degrees, to bonded labour and inhuman treatments.⁶¹

57. "India 1975", op. cit., p. 301.

58. Op. cit., p. 161.

59. Ibid., pp. 160 & 161.

60. Op. cit., p. 327.

61. Appendix 5 gives a few instances of bonded child labour. Though bonded labour and rural indebtedness have fortunately been abolished after the declaration of emergency, such laws risk to have little practical impact... As an editorial of the

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India

Official estimates of rural indebtedness, summed up in Table VI, describe a dismal situation. We can see that, according to all these surveys, the average debts of rural households have considerably increased over the years. The National Sample Surveys also maintain that there is a sharp increase in the percentage of indebted households, while the two other studies, with their very high percentage of indebtedness, consider that there is no change. A substantial part of rural debt —56% according to AIRCS study and 83% according to the National Income Committee— was also used for unproductive purposes.

TABLE VI
Estimates of Rural indebtedness⁶²

	AIRCS 1951-52	AIDIS 1961-62	NSS 1953-54	NSS 1960-61
Indebted Households				
in %:				
....A.H.	67 to 69	67 to 69		
....N.A.H.	52	52		
....T.H.			36	54
Average Debts in Rs.				
....A.H.	526	708		
....N.A.H.	249	430		
....T.H.	447	647	370	469

Indian Express puts it, "Similar laws have been enacted before, some as many as 50 years ago, and have co-existed with bonded labour for lack of implementation. In the ultimate analysis, bonded labour is an ugly facet of larger socio-economic problems, of altering the one-sided property relations that make possible such exploitation. However, the dimensions of the problem should no longer be an excuse for inaction in an area where poverty is allowed to subjugate generation after generation of legally free human beings. The ordinance is the first of several steps that must be taken to abolish individual slavery in a country which achieved its Independence 28 years ago". (December 3, 1975, quoted in "The Rally" vol. 52, No. 4, 1976, Madras 34).

62. We made this Table after consulting available statistics. See for example: Agarwal, op. cit., p. 327ff. The abbreviations stand for All India Rural Credit Survey (AIRCS), All India Debt and Investment Survey (AIDIS), National Sample Survey (NSS), Agricultural Households (A.H), Non-Agricultual Households (N.A.H.), and Total Households (T.H.).

A Frightening Picture

It might be good, before considering the phenomenon of inequality in India, to conclude this section with two quotations taken from students who are part of the Indian situation. With reference to the study of Dandekar and Rath, Romesh Diwas said: "Around 42 per cent of the whole population of India is so poor in 1970—after two decades of programmes and planning—that it cannot even afford a consumption that ensures minimum necessary calories. If one were to add.... the equally necessary need for shelter and some facilities for health, the percentage of population that is poor will increase.... One can round it off and say that two-thirds of the total population of India is just bloody poor, out of which 70 per cent are so poor that they do not get even enough calories. One can quarrel with these figures, but the conclusion is more or less the same whatever other figures one would use. Common observation does offer such magnitudes."⁶³ Rajni Kothari expressed his reactions thus: "The picture of the poor that emerges from various studies is truly frightening: it is a picture of large families exhibiting physical and psychic abnormality, incapacity for sustained work, even for a few hours, a pronounced inferiority complex, and a tendency to deal with pattern of exploitation and coercion by directing them inwards against their own dependants, and a vicious circle of parents inducting children into these characteristics of deprivation and degradation turning them into the same kind of adults when they grow up, and this seems to go on almost ad infinitum."⁶⁴

63. EPW, August 21, 1971, p. 1809, quoted by Ajit Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

64. EPW, Special Number, 1972, p. 1541, quoted by Ajit Roy, *ibid.* p. 4.

II. A LAND OF INEQUALITIES AND INJUSTICES

India is not only a land of massive poverty and misery. As practically as any other country, at least in the capitalist world, it is a land of tremendous inequalities and injustices. Our personal experiences and observations as well as scientific studies testify to this fact.⁶⁵ Even if we do not enter here into theoretical discussions on the relationship between poverty and inequality, it is obvious that the problem of distribution is a, perhaps, the major issue in India. With its declared ideal of an egalitarian and even socialist society, our country has actually recognized this fact and placed the reduction of inequalities in incomes and wealth among its priority of objectives.⁶⁶ Let us therefore find out whether these goals are being realised. For this, we shall consider three fields in which inequalities and injustices manifest themselves in our society: consumption, income and property patterns. We shall then be able to conclude this section with a bird's-eye view of the unjust and revolting picture presented by today's India.

Unequal Standards of Life

In the first section of this booklet, we have described the miserable standard of life of about two-thirds of our population. Quite often, we have also hinted at the fact that all the Indians do not live in such conditions. In spite of scarcity in our country, some sections of our society live in abundance. Periods of famine even provide excellent occasions for merchants to enrich themselves. Several varieties of food-stuffs are available for children, and even for pet-animals! During droughts, the cities, especially the rich areas, have sufficient water. Many houses, restaurants and hotels are built; and a large quantity of cloth is produced, but mainly for the rich. In India, if we can afford it, we can get the most sophisticated treatment in hospitals and private clinics. And the same situation prevails in the field of education. In short, experience shows that, in our country, we can buy almost anything we want, at least in the black market. There is hardly any scarcity for the rich. The advertisements shown in our theatres and the rich variety of goods available in our stores are constant reminders that the rich live in luxury while the poor cannot afford even the basic necessities of life.

65. The Sources are basically the same as for the question of poverty. We shall, however, occasionally mention other titles.

66. On this subject, see Agarwal, *op. cit.*, pp. 5 & 662.

Statistical studies corroborate our own experience and observations. Though a detailed analysis of the various items of the standard of life could be made, we shall be satisfied here with a study of the consumption pattern existing in our society.

Let us, first of all, consider the per capita availability of the basic consumption goods. Table VII,⁶⁷ taken from a 1974-75

TABLE VII

Per capita availability of basic consumption goods

Year	Cereals	Pulses	Total foodgrains	Edible Oils	
	(Grams per capita per day)			(kgs per year)	
1961-62	399	62	461		3.2
1964-65	418.6	61.6	480.2		3.6
1968-69	397.9	47.3	445.2		2.4
1969-70	403.1	51.9	455.0		2.8
1970-71	417.8	51.3	469.1		3.3
1971-72	420.2	47.1	467.3		2.9
1972-73	383.1	41.4	424.5		2.1
1973-74	408.5	39.9	448.4		3.0

	vanaspati	sugar	Cotton cloth	Tea	Coffee
	(Kgs per year)		(meters per year)	(grams per year)	
1961-62	0.7	5.8	14.8	309	57
1964-65	0.8	5.1	15.2	309	78
1968-69	0.9	5.0	14.4	353	75
1969-70	0.9	6.1	13.6	377	59
1970-71	1.0	7.3	13.6	387	113
1971-72	1.1	6.7	12.4	392	45
1972-73	1.0	6.1	13.2	404	66
1973-74	0.8	6.0	12.1	413	67

67. This table is taken from "Economic Survey, 1974-75", pp. 68-70; it is given in EPW, Vol. X, No. 38, 1975, p. 1494. An increase in production is not in itself a sign that the situation is improving. One has to take into account the population growth and to find out the per capita availability of goods. Even this can be misleading. To get a proper picture of the standard of life of our people, one has further to investigate the distribution of the consumption goods among the various strata of the population.

Govt. Publication, confronts us with a very distressing fact: the availability of basic necessities such as pulses, foodgrains, edible oils and cotton cloth has rather steadily decreased from 1961-62 to 1973-74,—with an exception for 1969-71,—while that of cereals, vanaspati, sugar, tea and coffee, have slightly increased. On the whole, we can say, the per capita availability of consumption goods was a little less in 1973-74 than in 1961-62. Even then, who enjoyed the greater shares of these goods?

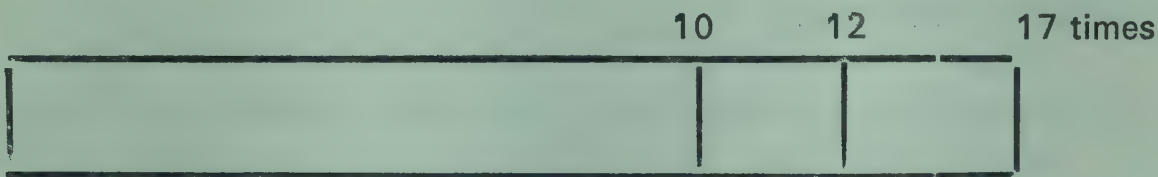
Agarwal, thus, sums up the findings of experts on unequal standards of life in India: "A picture of inequalities emerges from the consumption expenditure of the people. According to the National Sample Survey for 1959-60, out of the total consumption expenditure only eight per cent fell to the lot of 20 per cent of population at the bottom, where as it was as big as about 42 per cent for the 20 per cent at the top. The same conclusion follows from the survey by the National Council of Applied Economic Research for the year 1964-65. According to it the share of the bottom 20 per cent of families or households was 13 per cent and for the top 20 per cent of families, it was 35 per cent. An indication of the wide distance separating the rich from the poor in India can be had from the fact that in 1967-68, while the private consumption expenditure of the bottom five per cent people was Rs 78 at 1960-61 prices, it was Rs 1,330 for the top five per cent of the population. A similar pattern continues to exist for 1973-74. Assuming that no new redistributive measure were undertaken during the Fourth Plan, it has been estimated by B.S. Minhas that the average per capita consumption expenditure of the five per cent at the bottom comes to be Rs 88 at 1960-61 prices and for the five per cent at the top it is Rs 932. Although there is a decline in inequalities between 1967-68 and 1973-74, it is slight and negligible, leaving the broad picture of gross inequalities intact."⁶⁸

68. Agarwal, *op. cit.*, 77-78. The last two studies mentioned are: Dandekar-Rath, *op. cit.*, p. 29, and B.S. Minhas, *op. cit.*, p. 52. More recent studies corroborate these facts. According to a survey conducted by the Economic Section of "The Illustrated Weekly of India", the top 5% of the population consumed slightly more in 1972 than the bottom 30%, while the top 10% spent a little less than twice the consumption expenses of the bottom 30%... (September 10, 1972). G.P. Mishra also concluded that the consumption of the lowest 40% of the people represent 19.7% of the total consumption while the consumption of the top 10% represent 27.1%. ("Genesis of Current Crisis", in *Mainstream*, November 9, 1974,

As we try to understand these statistics, we shall amuse ourselves with some drawings ... They might also help us to visualize the situation! According to Dandekar-Rath, a rich city-dweller (from the top 5%) consumes 17 times more than a person from the lowest 5% of the urban population, while a rich villager consumes only 12 times more than a poor villager. Minhas calculates the amount to be 10 times more.

Pattern of Consumption:

One rich consumes 10, 12 or 17 times more than one poor.
(top 5%) (bottom 5%)



1

1	2	3	4	5	6
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One rich consumes as much as 3 to 6 poor
(top 20%) (bottom 20%)

p. 16). A most recent and detailed study, but of 1963-64, substantiates such statements. G.S. Chatterjee thus concludes his analysis: "At all-India level, the

If one takes the trouble of evaluating all the other statistics and of comparing the top and bottom 20%, he will see that one rich person (top 20%) consumes as much as that of 3 to 6 poor persons (bottom 20%). Some of our friends told us that their personal experiences led them to believe that the gap between the consumption of the poor and the rich was still greater!

We can, therefore, see that gross inequalities in consumption expenditure are very much part of the Indian situation.

Unequal Incomes

Disparities in incomes are still greater and more glaring. The "Report of the Committee on Distribution of Income and Levels of Living" has tabulated most of the findings of experts in the following way.⁶⁹

TABLE VIII

State of personal income-distribution* (Percentage Distribution)

Fractile group	Estimates of Iyengar & Mukerji 1956-57	Estimates of Lydall 1955-56	Estimates of RBI 1953-54 villages	Estimates of NCAER 1956-57 cities	Estimates of NCAER 1960 villages	Estimates of NCAER 1960 cities
Top 5 per cent	17.5	23.0	17.0	26.0	—	31.0
Top 10 per cent	25.0	34.0	25.0	37.0	33.6	42.4
Top 50 per cent	—	75.0	69.0	75.0	79.3	83.0
Bottom 20 per cent	8.5	9.5	9.0	7.0	4.0	4.0

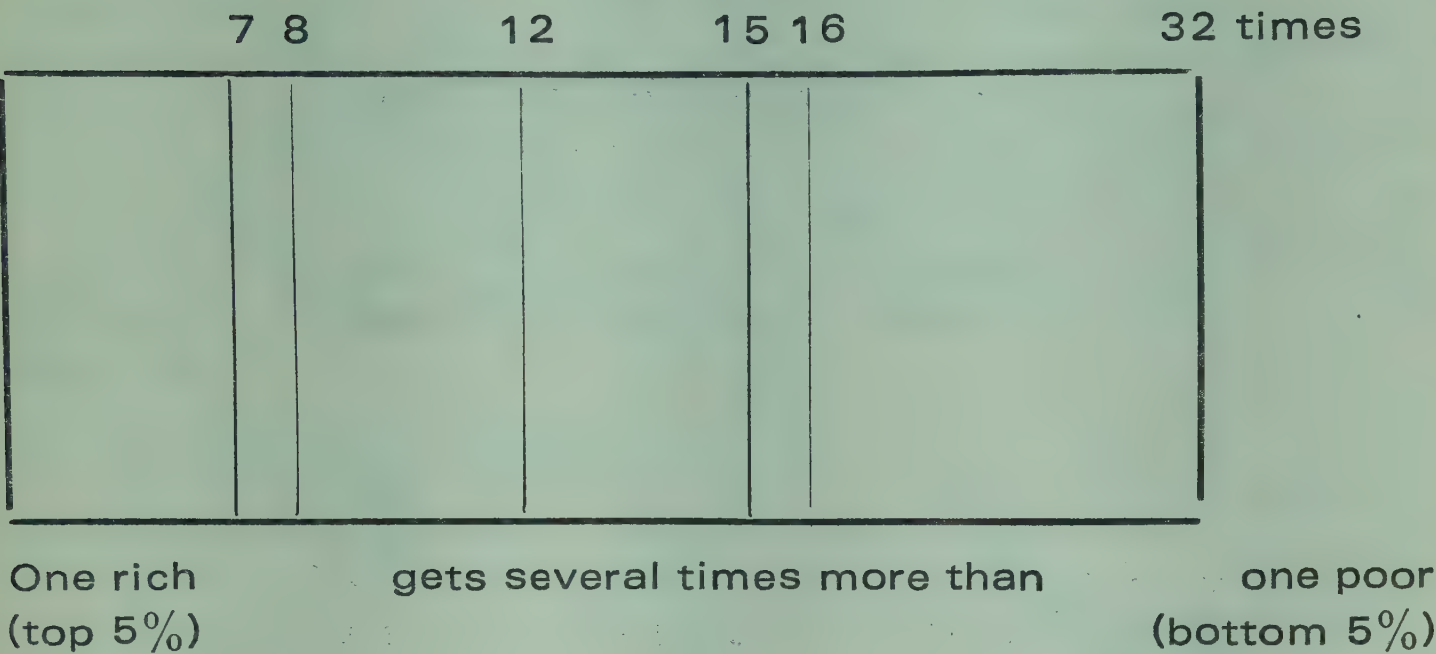
* In the case of the estimate by Lydall, bottom 25% get 9.5% of the national income.

shares of the top and bottom 20 per cent of the population in the rural areas are 39.44 per cent and 8.99 per cent respectively, the corresponding figures for the urban areas being 45.13 per cent and 7.64 per cent." (Disparities in per Capita Household Consumption in India," in EPW, April 10, 1976, p. 565).

69. Table 7.1, Agarwal, op. cit., p. 78.

Even if we assume that the lowest 20% equally share their incomes, we still come to the conclusion that the rich top 5% get 8 (Iyengar & Mukerji), 12 (Lydall), 7 (RBI for villages), 15 (RBI for cities), 16 (NCAER for villages) and 32 (NCAER for cities) times more income than the poor bottom 5%.

PATTERN OF INCOME



A breakdown in smaller percentage groups reveals greater disparities. A recent study conducted in 1968-69 by the NCAER, for example, gave the following income distribution pattern:

% of households	% of total income
1. Top 1%	10%
2. Top 2.5%	18%
3. Top 10%	34%
4. Lower 50%	22%
5. Lower 15%	4%

The same study shows that one crore people had to subsist with an average income of 27 paise per day, while 5 and 10 crore people respectively had 32 and 42 paise per day.⁷⁰ Great disparities, therefore, persist in the midst of unimaginable poverty!

Unequal Possessions

Inequalities in the distribution of wealth are still larger and more glaring. In fact, they constitute the major source of disparities in incomes and, consequently, in consumption. The

70. "The New Year Book 1972", Academic Publishers, Calcutta, p. 256.

income distribution pattern of a country is usually much related to the ownership of rural; urban and industrial property.

Let us, first of all, take the distribution of agricultural land in villages. Table IX⁷¹ gives the evolution of the distribution of rural property during the first decade after Independence:

TABLE IX
Land Distribution Pattern

Acres	1951		1961	
	% of rural households	% of total cultivated land owned	% of rural household	% of total cultivated land owned
1. Landless	23.09	-	26.3	-
2. upto 2.5	38.15	6.23	31.3	7.1
3. 2.5 to 10	25.99	28.49	30.0	33.8
4. 10 to 25	9.17	29.11	9.5	31.0
5. more than 25	3.60	36.17	2.9	28.1

Comments are almost superfluous. In 1951, the top 12.8% of the rural households (groups 4 & 5) owned 65.2% of the total cultivated land, and in 1961, the 12.4% still had 59.1%. Again, in 1951, the landless and small peasants (groups 1 & 2) represented 61.24% of the rural households and owned only 6.3%; and in 1961, they were 57.6% and still had only 7.1%. Table IX moreover, makes it clear that the land concentration pattern has hardly changed during that decade. An official study has also shown that the rural set-up has basically remained the same in the following decade. According to a Govt. report in 1971, the top 2.85% of the rural households actually owned as much as 28.84% of the total area, while the bottom 44% had only 1.59%.⁷²

The following extract explains how little we had progressed in the field of land redistribution by March 1976: "As against four million acres of surplus land estimated to become available as a result of the enforcement of the revised land ceiling in con-

71. The data are taken from "Census of India 1951", and NSS, 17th round, 1961.

72. P. S. Appu, Joint Secretary-cum-land Reforms Commissioner, "Ceiling on Agricultural Holdings"; Govt. of India, 1971, p. 37.

formity with the national guidelines of July 1972, only about 2.16 lakh acres had been declared surplus and 19,000 acres distributed by April 1975. While announcing the 20-point programme, the Prime Minister had laid special emphasis on implementing the ceiling laws "with redoubled zeal". The result so far has not been such as to suggest that this has been done. Only 6.5 lakh acres have been declared surplus so far, an improvement of less than 4.5 lakh acres over the April 1975 figure. This is just a fraction of the estimated surplus of 40 lakh acres. Of the 6.5 lakh acres declared surplus, only 3.23 lakh acres have been taken possession of by the state governments and 1.36 lakh acres have been distributed among the landless. As mentioned at the Chief Ministers conference, it is doubtful whether even the 1.36 lakh acres claimed to have been distributed have actually passed into the hands of the landless.⁷³

Who Owns The Land ?

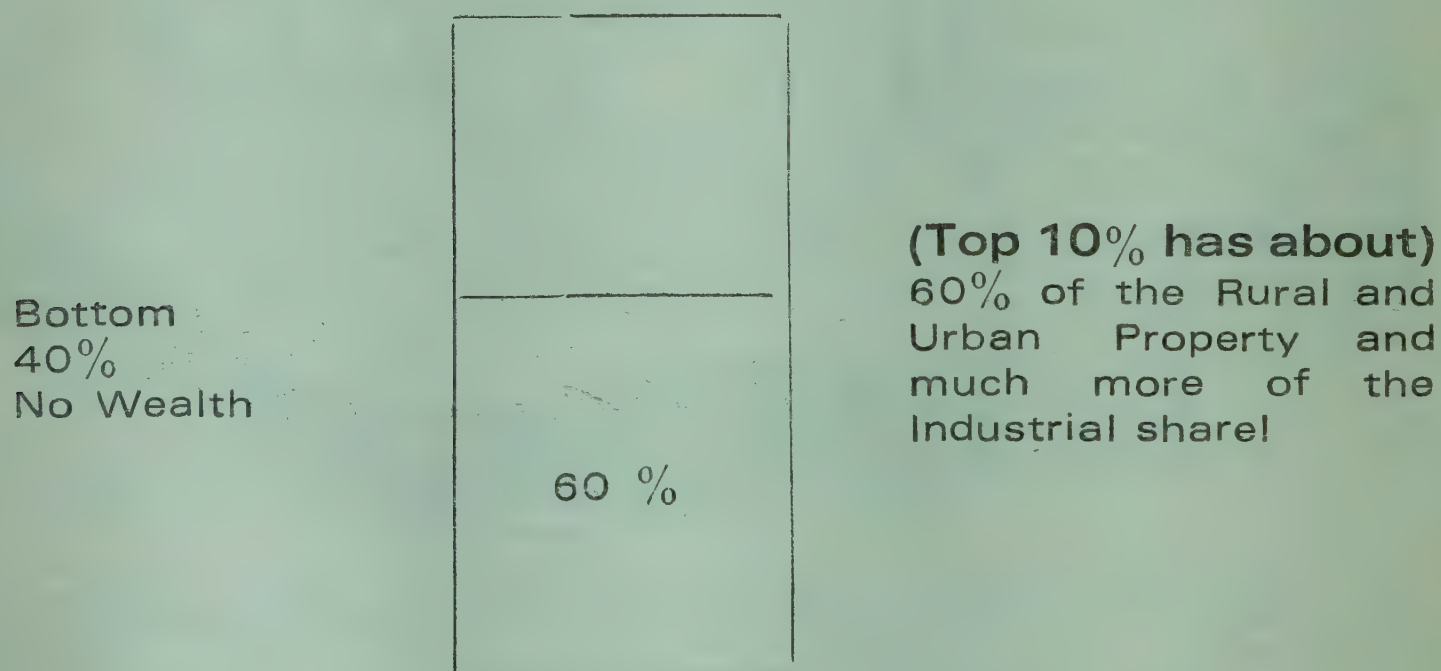


The bottom 40% has hardly any land while top 10% has 60% of the land.

73. "Chief Ministers and Land Reforms", in EPW, March 13, 1976, p. 413. The Chief Ministers' Conference pledged itself to complete the implementation of land ceiling laws by June 30, 1976; that is, to perform in 4 months a task that had been impossible in the last 20 years. Our fifth booklet will make a detailed study of agricultural policies. On this question, see: Agarwal, op. cit., pp. 251-286, and Ajit Roy, op. cit., pp. 12-30.

C.K. Kurien describes the distribution pattern of urban property and industrial capital in the following way: "The top 10 percent of home-owning households in the urban sector accounted for 57 per cent of the total wealth held in the form of owner-occupied houses and the top 20 per cent accounted for 73 per cent of the houses, while the bottom 10 per cent owned only one per cent of house property. As for the ownership of industrial capital it has been estimated that the top one-tenth of one per cent of households, when ranked by dividend income, owns more than half of the total personal wealth in the form of shares. It would thus appear that ownership of shares is much more concentrated than the ownership of land holdings or residential house property."⁷⁴ It is easy to give more details on the concentration of industrial assets. According to the official report of the Committee on Distribution of Income and Levels of Living, presided by Prof. Mahalanobis, 1.6% of the industrial companies controlled 53% of the total industrial capital, while 86% of the companies had only 14.6%. In 1970, the share capital of the top 75 house represented 53% of the total industrial capital; it was only 45% in 1961-62. Since then, monopolies and large corporations have continued to grow and to accumulate more and more economic power.⁷⁵ In fact, the incentives given to industries by the Government after the declaration of emergency risk to accentuate this trend.

WEALTH DISTRIBUTION PATTERN



74. Op. cit., p. 53, The author quotes from the Report of the Committee on the Distribution of Income and Levels of Living 1964. On this subject, see also Agarwal, op. cit., pp. 79 and 82.

75. See Agarwal's chapter, "Monopoly and Concentration", op. cit., pp. 527-539. Our fifth booklet will also deal with this question.

A Revolting Picture

Though we might question some of these statistics (and drawings) it remains undeniable that there are gross inequalities in consumption, income and property ownership in our country. There is no doubt either that there has been no reduction in them since Independence. The only question left open is whether disparities are on the increase; opinions are divided on this issue.⁷⁶ It has, therefore, to be admitted that our Planning has been a dismal failure in the sphere of social justice. Agarwal can, therefore, conclude his book with these words: "India is inhabited by the poor whose number has not declined; it has in fact increased. The question of all questions is why a few have benefited from the toil of the millions? And where do we go from here? The answer is simple. We did not build distribution policies into the plans of production. The need, therefore, is to integrate the two. It means hard talk and action, and not taking soft options as before. There are in fact no soft options."⁷⁷

India is therefore, as much the reign of inequalities and injustices as it is of poverty and misery. The picture presented by our country is not only frightening, as we concluded at the end of our first section. IT IS ALSO REVOLTING. Our country is divided between the rich and poor.⁷⁸ This is the real and the greatest problem. A minority of our population live in luxury, while the masses subsist below the poverty line. Luxury in the midst of such poverty is a crying scandal. It is revolting. Gandhi had said that such a situation would not be tolerated a single day in free India.⁷⁹ And we have tolerated it since the time of Independence! What is worse, we might not even be much aware of the depth of the injustices prevailing in our

76. Agarwal has a detailed discussion on this subject (op. cit., pp. 79-83). According to him, and to the special Committee appointed by the Government in 1960 to study this question, further data are needed for definite answers. It, however, seems that inequalities are greater in cities than in villages. Disparities also tend slightly to diminish in the rural areas and to increase in the cities.

77. Op. cit., p. 672. For further references on the failure of social justice in India, see the same book, pp. 38, 83, 428, 650-51, and 666. The author does not recommend distributive measures mainly on humanitarian grounds, but on those of efficient economic planning (pp. 76-77).

78. On the division between the rich and the poor, see appendix 4.

79. See appendices 11 and 12.

country....Or we might not question them radically.. But how can we explain such inequalities in consumption, income and wealth? How can we allow the use of India's resources for luxury goods? How can we accept the existing priorities in production? How can we be so reticent about ceilings on urban and rural properties and so keen on just compensation for confiscated goods and lands? These are some of the questions that this world of inequalities should raise within us.

Conclusion: THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

In this booklet, we have described the destitution—like standards of life of the majority of our population. We have also emphasised the large and glaring disparities in consumption, income and ownership patterns that exist in our present-day society. The somewhat respectable 4.5% annual growth of our real national income has been, to a great extent, eaten up by the population explosion; this has resulted in a very slow annual growth of about 1% in our real per capita income. Even this growth has hardly benefited the majority of our population, for most of the benefits were monopolised by the upper classes of our society. This is the frightening and revolting picture of present-day India. The situation is so dismal that it has been accepted as normal in all our writings and speeches and to identify "the poor" with "the common man" in India. According to our analysis, the poor are, in fact, "the unjustly treated" and the oppressed people. We hope that our readers will make use of the appendices and the questionnaire found at the end of this booklet to enter more deeply into the real life-situation of the poor and the oppressed in India.

It is a well-known fact that, before the coming of the British, India was as rich as any other country. Its possibilities for industrialization and balanced growth were as good as those of any other nation. It is perhaps less well-known that India is rather rich in natural resources. Scholars can, for example write: "The short survey of India's resources (given above) shows that on the whole Nature has been very generous to India, almost lavish in some respects....India seems to be thus marked out to be one of the most prosperous countries of the world.... But what is the actual position? Poverty stalks the land, a poverty for which there is no parallel in the world. It is nothing short of a paradox that we should be poor while our country is so rich. Indians have been described as a poor people in a rich

country.”⁸⁰ The contrasts between past and contemporary India, as well as between the natural riches of our country and the present standards of life of our people, raise many questions. What has taken place after the arrival of the British? What has happened to our economy? How can we make a better use of our resources? How is it, that after almost 30 years of Independence, our country has not succeeded to reduce inequalities and to improve the standards of life of the majority of our people? What has gone wrong with our policies? Such questions will be tackled in our fourth and fifth booklets on “British Rule and the Independence Movement” and “Post-Independence Economic Policies.”

India's search for development, moreover, confirms the experience of other countries. It shows that attempts at economic development, without the corresponding and even preliminary structural changes, have nothing to offer to the poor masses of underdeveloped countries. Many experts even contend that, in the Third World, economic growth greatly depends on the distributive measures; in any case, it is obvious that mere economic development without social justice hardly benefits the poor. The modernization and even neo-modernization approaches to development end up, ultimately, in failure. It has become clear that a direct attack on poverty and inequalities is urgently required. The facts brought out in “The Indian Situation”, therefore, constitute an excellent confirmation of the more theoretical analysis found in “The Development Debate.”

This booklet has also raised some very serious and pertinent questions on the real meaning of equality and social justice as well as on the various forces operating in our society. If true development implies equality and social justice—as the title of this series of booklets suggests—, will the rich, who desire to retain and hold on to their advantages and privileges, be the greatest obstacles to development? What are the various forces at work in society? How does society function? What are the various types of societies that can be envisioned? How can social change really occur? These are some of the issues we will systematically consider in our third booklet on “Methods of Societal Analysis”. This theoretical study will help us to understand in greater depth the

80. K.K. Dewett, G.C. Singh, J.D. Varma, “Indian Economics”. S. Chand & Co. Ltd., Delhi, 1973, p. 123. On this subject of our natural resources, see similar views in Agarwal, op. cit., pp 195-214.

mechanisms operating in Indian society and in the world at large.

A few words need to be added about the future of our country. We sincerely hope that our description of "The Indian Situation" has not led any of our readers to any state of despair about the future of India. Our human and natural resources are plenty ; there is, therefore; no place whatever to despair. There are genuine possibilities for India's development. We would not like, however, to reassure our readers too easily of any quick and immediate success. India's search for genuine development and social justice is only beginning. In fact, it is an uphill struggle—as some persons are against such development. Great possibilities, therefore, exist, though the future remains uncertain as ever. Will we fail or succeed in realising the vision of Mahatma Gandhi in building "an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country, in whose making they have an effective voice, an India in which there shall be no high class and low class people, an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony"?⁸¹ The future is uncertain, unless we ourselves become a part of this search for the genuine development of India.

81. Quoted by ex-President Giri, in Mohan Dharia's book. "Fumes and the Fire", S. Chand & Co. Ltd., New Delhi, 1975, p. 6.

APPENDICES* India

I — THE REIGN OF POVERTY AND INJUSTICES

- 1. The Great Scandal of the Century, Robert McNamara**
- 2. The Gamut of Hunger, Josue de Castro**
- 3. Lifelong Death from Hunger, Mark Twain**
- 4. The Rich and the Poor, Julius K. Nyerere**
- 5. Bonded Labour in 1976, the Deccan Herald**
- 6. Fair Shares for All, J. and B. Stringfellow**
- 7. The Song of the Low, Ernest Jones**

II — THE REIGN OF HIDDEN VIOLENCE

- 8. The Existing Social Disorder, Helder Camera**
- 9. The Mask of Law and Order, S.Y. Devananda**
- 10. Everyone is a Thief**
- 11. Free India, Mahatma Gandhi**
- 12. 'Land Grab' Gandhian Style, Mahatma Gandhi**

* Though several of these passages were originally written in a different context, they enable us to enter more deeply into the life of the poor and to question and unmask the values that perpetuate the present situation in India. The first series of appendices is rightly entitled "The Reign of Poverty and Injustice". McNamara, first of all, describes the present world situation as "The Great Scandal of the Century". The sociologist Josue de Castro and the poet Mark Twain, then, help us, by their respective approaches, to understand better the implications of hunger and malnutrition (2 & 3). Nyerere asserts that the real problem of the modern world is the division between the rich and the poor; he also shows how inequalities create a life of dependency and inhumanity for the poor (4). This phenomenon cannot be more vividly portrayed than in the lives of our bonded labourers which number millions (5). Two poems finally contrast the conditions of the rich and the poor in society (6 & 7). The second series of appendices, "The Reign of Hidden Violence", raises challenging questions on our values and vision of society. Helder Camera denounces today's society as "established disorder" (8). The poet Devananda pursues the same trend of thought and shows many inconsistencies in our understanding of society (9); Appendix 10 offers us thought-provoking sayings on the question of accumulation of wealth under the guise of private property; while the last two appendices place before us the unfulfilled dreams of Mahatma Gandhi (11 & 12). How long will the reign of poverty, injustice and hidden violence, continue to be imposed on the Indian masses?

1. The Great Scandal of the Century*¹

"What are we to say of a world in which hundred millions of people are not poor in statistical terms but are faced with day to day deprivations that degrade human dignity to levels which no statistic can adequately describe? A developing world in which children under the age of five account for only 20% of the population but for more than 60% of the deaths. A developing world in which 2/3 of the children who have escaped death live on, restricted in their growth by malnutrition - a malnutrition that can stunt both bodies and minds alike. A developing world in which there are 100 million more illiterates than there were 20 years ago. A developing world in short in which death and disease are rampant, education and employment scarce, squalor and stagnation common and opportunity and realization of personal potential drastically limited. This is the world of today for the 2 billion human beings who live in more than 95 developing countries. The personal catastrophe that affects the individual lives of hundred millions of these individuals is the great scandal of the century."

2. The Gamut of Hunger*²

"Hunger is an extremely variable phenomenon. It can exist as acute starvation, turning its victims into veritable living skeletons, or it can work insidiously to produce subtle chronic deficiencies almost without outward sign. Between these extremes it can attack mankind in many strange and spectacular disguises. There is a whole gamut of the degrees of hunger and its various effects on mankind make up an intricate and complicated history.

Ordinarily, when people speak of collective hunger, the images that come to mind are of famished multitudes, physically and mentally devastated by extreme starvation... Students of nutrition, however, recognize more types of hunger than the starvation which chiefly interests reporters and their readers. These other forms are less spectacular, but they are of much greater social significance. They affect a greater number of people, and their action is continuous, working from one generation to another.

*1 Robert McNamara, Address to UNCTAD III.

*2 Josue de Castro "Geography of Hunger", Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1952, pp. 33-69. The whole chapter is worth reading.

Nutritional deficiencies, as such partial hungers are called, have no external symptoms, although they compromise the health. Others reveal themselves openly as typical diseases—the deficiency diseases. The number of such deficiencies is very great, their intensity is variable, and their possible combinations practically infinite.

One of the most serious and widespread of dietary lacks, or specific hungers, is protein deficiency....Observations in all parts of the world substantiate the principle of the degrading effects of protein deficiencies on the anthropological character of the individual. Many characteristics formerly thought to be exclusively the result of racial inheritance today are known to depend in greater part on the action of environment, particularly on the type of alimentation the environment affords...There is no doubt whatever the low stature of tropical peoples is not a racial characteristic, but is the result of defective diet, that is insufficient in proteins.

Another class of specific hungers widely distributed among human beings results from dietary deficiencies in certain mineral elements. Mineral salts are as important to the organism as calories or protein....(the most important) are iron, calcium, sodium and iodine...Dwarfism, external goitre: deaf-mutism, feeble-mindedness—such are the commonest manifestations of endemic cretinism, resulting from iodine deficiency.

The most varied, the richest in nuances, of all the groups of specific hungers is without any doubt the group of vitamin deficiencies. It is also the most familiar to us....Those whose absence brings about ill effects on human masses collectively are the vitamins A, B¹, B², C, D and G.

Men subjected to total hunger, react as violently as animals. The overwhelming action of hunger dulls all of man's other vital interests and desires, even suppresses them completely. His whole thinking is actively concentrated on finding something to eat, no matter what the means, no matter what the risk....The other forces that mould human behaviour are brushed aside....The sensation of acute hunger is not continuous; it is intermittent, with periodic ups and downs. The first stage of starvation is an abnormal nervous excitement, an extreme irritability, and a violent exaltation of the senses. This immediately followed by apathy, extreme depression, nausea, and inability to concentrate....

The effects on the spirit of undernourishment, or chronic hunger, are less spectacular than those of starvation, but more

prolonged and persistent in their action. While acute hunger usually causes some form of abnormal excitement, chronic hunger tends to induce depression and apathy. People suffering from chronic hunger soon lose their appetites, no longer feel the sensation of hunger and thus cease to react to the spur which is man's strongest goad to action. Chronically undernourished populations are almost insensible to their lack of food; their appetite is scant, and sometimes even disappears.... The psychological effect of chronic hunger is to make sex important enough to compensate emotionally for the shrunken nutritional appetite ...

Whether they come singly or in battalions, specific hungers are powerful, and they leave their signatures on the bodies and souls of human beings. The truth is that no other environmental factor acts upon man so despotically, nor leaves so deep a mark, as the factor of nutrition."

3. Lifelong Death from Hunger*³

"There were two "Reigns of Terror", if we could but remember and consider it; the wrought murder in hot passions, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted more months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon a thousand persons, the other upon a hundred million; but our shudders are all for the "horrors" of the minor Terror, the momentary Terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty and heartbreak? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief Terror which we all have been so diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror—that unspeakable bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves."

4. The Rich and the Poor*⁴

"Poverty is not the real problem of the modern world, for we have the knowledge and the resources which will enable us to overcome poverty. The real problem of the modern world,

*3 This text is taken from "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court". Mark Twain compares the horrors of the French Revolution with those of poverty and misery.

*4 An extract from President Julius K. Nyerere's address to the Maryknoll Sisters' General Chapter, New York, 1972.

the thing which creates misery, wars and hatred amongst men, is the division of mankind into rich and poor. We can see this division at two levels. Within nation states there are a few individuals who have great wealth and whose wealth gives them great power. But the vast majority of the people suffer from varying degrees of poverty and deprivation. Even in a country like the United States, this division can be seen. In countries like India, Portugal or Brazil the contrast between the wealth of a few privileged individuals and the dire poverty of the masses is a crying scandal. And looking at the world as a collection of nation states we see the same pattern repeated: there are a few wealthy nations which dominate the whole world, economically and therefore politically, and a mass of smaller and poor nations whose destiny, it appears, is to be dominated.

The significance about this division between rich and poor is not simply that one man has more food than he can eat, more clothes than he can wear, and more houses than he can live in, while others are hungry, unclad and homeless. The significant thing about the division between rich and poor, and rich and poor nations is not simply that one has the resources to provide comfort for all its citizens and the other cannot provide basic services. The reality and the depth of the problem arises because the man who is rich has power over the lives of those who are poor. And the rich nation has power over the policies of those who are not rich.

It has been estimated that up to 500 million people on the earth today are suffering from hunger, from never having enough to eat. Further, one out of every two of the world's peoples is suffering from malnutrition, from deficiencies of protein, from rather essential health giving foods....So the world is not one. Its peoples are more divided now and also more conscious of their division, than they have ever been before. They are divided between those who are satiated and those who are hungry; they are divided between those with power and those without power; they are divided between those who dominate and those who are dominated, between those who exploit and those who are exploited. And it is the minority which is well fed and the minority which has secured control of the world's wealth and even their fellow men.

Those who control a man's livelihood control a man. His freedom is eroded and his equal humanity is denied

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when he depends upon others for **the right to work** and **the right to eat**. Equally, a nation is not independent if its economic resources are controlled by another nation. Political independence is meaningless if a nation does not control the means by which its citizens can earn their living. In other words, the development of peoples follows from economic development only if this latter is achieved on the basis of the equality and human dignity of all those involved. And human dignity cannot be given to a man by the kindness of others; indeed it can be destroyed by kindness which emanates from an action of charity. For human dignity involves equality, and freedom, and relations of mutual respect among men. Further, it depends upon responsibility and on a conscious participation in the life of the society in which man moves and works. The whole structure of national societies and of international society is therefore relevant to the development of the peoples. And there are few societies which can now be said to serve this purpose, for there are few, if any, which both accept and are organized to serve social justice in what has been called the revolution of rising expectations.

The needs of mankind are second, if they are considered at all. There is no profit producing cheap houses, so they are not produced. There is no money for schools and hospitals, but luxury apartments can be built, and six lane highways. For these things money can be found. And the result is a few men living in great luxury, using the wealth produced by men for their own grandeur and to ensure their own power. At the same time, masses of men, women and children are reduced to beggars, and to squalor, and to the humiliation of that disease and soul destroying insecurity which arises out of their enforced poverty. Let us be quite clear about this. Men are shaped by the circumstances in which they live. If they are treated like animals they will act like animals. If they are denied dignity they will act without dignity. If they are treated solely as a dispensable means of production they will become solely hands to whom life is a matter of doing as little work as possible, and then escaping into the illusion of happiness and pride through vice. Therefore, we must seek to ensure that man can have dignity in their lives and in their work. We must become a force of social justice and must work with other forces of social justice wherever they are and whatever they are called. Further, we must recognize that men can only progress and can only grow in dignity by working for themselves and working together for their common good.

5. Bonded Labour in 1976*⁵

"Four Harijan children given as hostages and put to work for debts incurred by their fathers were freed from bonded service here today...

The eldest, 15-year-old Gundamuniappa, started as a bonded labourer nearly 10 years ago when his father, Kadirappa, borrowed Rs. 200 from a landowner of Suddaguntepalaya on the southern fringes of the city. Kadirappa, a coolie, borrowed the money for his brother's wedding and gave an "on demand" note and his child, both to be redeemed when the amount was cleared. The boy was to be paid Rs. 20 a year. But no wages were paid as the creditors claimed that the wage was adjusted towards interest.

A couple of years later when his wife fell ill Kadirappa sought another loan of Rs. 200 on the same terms from another landowner of his village—Suddagundapalaya. This time he sent his second child Kariappa, now aged about 13. A third son—Munivenkata—was "pledged" along with an "on demand" note to a landowner of Bommanahalli four miles away. This time the amount of loan taken was Rs. 150. There was no special occasion, but he had found it hard to provide for his wife and Munivenkata and his younger brother on the casual Rs. 4 a day he was earning. That was four years ago.

The day began for these children sometime before dawn. Roused at four or five a.m., they had to draw water, sweep and swab, water and groom the cattle, work in the field or graze cattle. Coming home after dark they were given other chores which kept them busy till at least 10 p.m. They were given three meals a day mostly of ragi and "saru". Two sets of clothes were given—**one** at Ugadi and **one** for Dasara. They were sometimes beaten for neglecting their work. The privileges of visiting their parents was given to them once a week. For two of the brothers placed out in bonded labour to adjoining houses, it was especially galling as their home was only a tantalising furlong away.

No pocket money was ever given and whatever nominal wage—around Rs. 20 for a whole year's labour—was treated as interests. With their earnings being adjusted, Kadirappa looked nowhere near redeeming his children from perpetual unrewarding servitude till four days ago.

*⁵ Taken from the "Deccan Herald", Bangalore, April 15, 1976, p. 1.

Four days ago, Kariappa, the second son, revolted against his lot and ran away home. He complained of the boil on his chest and said that he couldn't do the work. Promptly the creditor who held Kariappa as hostage demanded the return of the boy or the money which he had borrowed against the "on demand" note. If his child was unwell, either Kadirappa or his wife would have to do the work he was told. Rebellion proved infectious and the eldest boy too ran away from his place of work. Again the landlord threatened action. Caught between the threats of his creditors, the attitudes of his wife and his own internal conflicts, Kadirappa told his story to a social worker of the Ambedkar Society at Madivalla who directed him to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate.

Enquiries conducted on the spot showed there was one more case of a child being given as bonded labourer. This was Krishna, a sprightly 12-year-old who began his servitude four years ago when his father, another coolie borrowed Rs. 50. He was out grazing cattle at the time, but was fetched and freed. All the four packed up their two or three sets of ragged clothes and other belongings—in each case, an aluminium plate and tumbler and were sent home. They were told that they could work or play as they like and if they worked they were entitled to a daily wage."

6. Fair Shares For All*⁶

1. Let's share the food, my brother,
Let's share the fruits of the earth.
Steak for me and rice for you,
Eggs for tea and rice for you,
It's nice for me, but rice for you;
Fruit and wine and milk and jam,
Cheese and pickles and fish and ham
For me;

And a little rice, just a little rice
(If you're lucky) for you.

*⁶ "Faith, Folk & Clarity, A collection of Folk Songs", Peter Smith (ed.), Galliard, England, 1967, p. 31. This song of J. and B. Stringfellow brings out the contrast between the rich and the poor. In the third verse, the original word "reserve" has been replaced by "slum".

2. Let's share the pain, my brother,
You shall have more than your share.
Pains for you and pills for me,
Germs for you and jabs for me,
Though you die young, long life for me ;
Tranquillisers, deep X-ray,
Penicillin, and nothing to pay,
For me ;
 And a little clinic, just a mobile clinic
 (Per hundred thousand people) for you.
3. Let's share the world, my brother,
Apartheid means equal shares.
Your land for us, and mine for me,
Sand for you, and soil for me,
What's left for you, the best for me ;
Schools and bridges, roads and trains,
Oil and tractors, libraries, 'planes,
For me ;
 And a nice little slum, yes; a nice slum
 (When your working life is over) for you.
4. Let's share the war, my brother,
Let's share the horrors of war.
Peace for me, napalm for you,
Trade for me, but raids for you,
Away for me, at home for you ;
Cripples, orphans, refugees,
Villages burned, no leaves on trees:
For you ;
 And a little pang of conscience, just a little twinge
 (Not very often) for me.
5. Let's share our wealth, my brother,
Let's share all that you have.
Gold for me, and beads for you,
Christ for me, the devil take you,
There's two for me, and none for you ;
Bingo, bombs, and drugs, and booze,
Money to burn and waste and lose
For me ;
 And a little aid, just a little aid
 (When we can spare it), for you.

7. The Song of the Low^{*7}

Refrain We're low — we're low — we're very, very low,
 As low as low can be ;
 The rich are high — for we make them so —
 And a miserable lot are we!
 And a miserable lot are we! are we!
 A miserable lot are we!

1. We plough and sow — we're so very, very low,
 That we delve in the dirty clay,
 Till we bless the plain with the golden grain.
 And the vale with the fragrant hay.
 Our place we know — we're so very low,
 'This down at the landlord's feet:
 We're not too low — the bread to grow
 But too low the bread to eat.
2. Down, down we go — we're so very, very low
 To the hell of the deep sunk mines
 But we gather the proudest gems that glow,
 When the crown of a despot shines;
 And whenever he lacks — upon our backs
 Fresh loads he deigns to lay,
 We're far too low to vote the tax
 But we're not too low to pay.
3. We're low, we're low — mere rabble, we know,
 But at our plastic power,
 The mould at the lordling's feet will grow
 Into palace and church and tower —
 Then prostrate fall — in the rich man's hall,
 And cringe at the rich man's door,
 We're not too low to build the wall,
 But too low to tread the floor.
4. We're low, we're low — we're very, very low,
 Yet from our fingers glide
 The silken flow — and the robes that glow,

^{*7} An extract from Ernest Jones' poem "The Song of the Low", The Penguin Book of Socialist Verse, pp. 81-82.

Round the limbs of the sons of pride
 And what we get—and what we give,
 We know—and we know our share
 We're not too low the cloth to weave—
 But too low the cloth to wear.

5. We're low, we're low—we're very, very, low,
 And yet when the trumpets ring,
 The thrust of a poor man's arm will go
 Through the heart of the proudest king!
 We're low, we're low—our place we know,
 We're only the rank and file,
 We're not too low—to kill the foe,
 But too low to touch the spoil.

8. The Existing Social Disorder*⁸

"Today 85 per cent, tomorrow 90 per cent (of the world's people) rot in misery to make possible the economic comfort of 15 per cent and tomorrow 10 per cent of the world's population."

"Many...are deterred by the fear that, if changes are too rapid, they may upset the 'social order'....The Social Order? But what Social Order are they talking about? The one that we see today, which consists in leaving millions of God's children in miserable poverty, should rather be called social disorder, systematised injustice."

9. The Mask of Law and Order*⁹

When a poor man
 takes a few coconuts
 From his rich neighbour's land
 to feed his children who are in need,
 that is robbery,

*8 Helder Camera, quoted in "Action for World Development", in "Logos", The Centre for Society and Religion, Ceylon, Vol. 12, no. 2, p. 4.

*9 Sevaka Yohan Devananda. This extract is taken from "Violent Lanka The Day for Slaughter, An Interpretation of the Revolt of April 1971", printed by "Church Missionary Society", 157 Waterloo Road, London, U.K. This short poem of six pages is beautiful and thought-provoking.

according to the law.
He can be convicted,
perhaps even jailed.

When a rich man
lives in wanton luxury,
spends infinitely more than he needs
on food, clothes, amusements,
while others are starving, naked, wretched,
that is legitimate.
There is no law
to convict him.

The laws are made by the rich,
who make them,
not to convict themselves
but to oppress the poor.
If the poor made the laws,
it would be a different story.
The rich may then be seen
in their true colours.

When a rich man
owns hundreds or thousands of acres,
while there are others
who do not own an inch,
that is not robbery
that is because we must,
at all costs,
safeguard the sacredness
of private property,
which means just reward
for the labour of ancestors
so that descendants
may not labour.

When an employer
pays himself infinitely more
than the worker—than his own servant
that is not robbery
that is merely just reward
for education and culture,

that is the way
to encourage initiative and enterprise.

When a poor man
in desperation,
gets drunk,
picks a quarrel,
draws a knife,
kills,
that, obviously, is murder—violence,
punishable by death.

When company directors
sack workers with impunity
and so condemn whole families
to penury and want,
that is not violence,
because no knife has been used.

No knife need be used,
a peremptory word suffices.
Labour tribunals need not be feared overmuch,
loopholes can be found, laws delays,
political influence...

Basically, the system stinks,
the system of law and order,
the system dominates individuals
the ultimate sanctions rest on
violence,
no less violence,
because it is often hidden, indirect,
subtle violence,
not recognized as violence.

Yet, in our society—
there is legalized robbery and violence
in normal times—
respectable men of power
in sangha, church, and state,
robbing in broad daylight,
violent,
spilling the blood of the people
continuously

in complete freedom,
with impunity,
proud and unrepentant,
self-righteous, complacent...

So, established law and order
it is not as simple as all that.
There is established injustice,
established disorder, massive
institutionalised disorder,
naked oppression,
masquerading under the guise of
law and order,
continuously, all the time.

10. **Everyone is a Thief***¹⁰

"Everyone, whether he knows it or not, is a thief. Whoever possesses something which he does not need is a thief."

"The one who is rich possesses many superfluous things. If every one had only what was necessary; nobody would be in need of anything, and all would be satisfied."

(Mahatma Gandhi)

"You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich".

(St. Ambrose)

"The rich take what belongs to everyone, and claim they have the right to own it, to monopolize it".

(St. Basil)

"I am criticized often for my continual attacks upon the rich. Yes: because the rich continually attack the poor".

(St. John Chrysostom)

*10 Most of these texts on "private property and oppression," are taken from "Logos," op. cit., pp. 35-36. Modern writers would distinguish between "private property" and "ownership of the means of production."

"The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry man, the coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to the man who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belongs to the man who has no shoes; the money which you put in the bank belongs to the poor. You do wrong to everyone you could help, but fail to help." (St. Basil)

11. Free India*¹¹

"Working for economic equality means levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and the levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists; the contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class remains. It cannot last one day in free India, the poor will enjoy the same power as the rich in the land."

12. Land Grab Gandhian Style*¹²

(Interview with Louis Fischer, June, 1942)

"What would happen to a free India?" I asked, "What is your programme for the improvement of the lot of the peasantry?" "The peasants would take the land", he replied, "We would not have to tell them to take it. They would take it". "Should the landlords be compensated?" I asked.

"No", he said, "that would be fiscally impossible." "You see," he smiled, "our gratitude to our millionaire friends does not prevent us from saying such things. The village would become a self-governing unit living its own life."

Another interview given two days later runs thus:

"Well," I asked, "how do you actually see your impending Civil Disobedience Movement? What shape will it take?"

*11 This text of Mahatma Gandhi is quoted by M.L. Dantwala, "Poverty in India, Then and now, 1870-1970", p. 64.

*12 Text given by R. Das Gupta, "Problems of Economic Transition", National Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, p. 388.

"In the villages," Gandhi explained, "the peasants will stop paying taxes. They will make salt despite official prohibition... Their next step will be to seize the land." "With violence?" I asked. "There may be violence, but then again the landlords may cooperate." "You are an optimist," I said. "They might cooperate by fleeing", Gandhi said. "Or", I said, "they might organise violent resistance?" "There may be fifteen days of chaos," Gandhi speculated, "but I think we could soon bring that under control." "You feel then that it must be confiscation without compensation", I asked. "Of course", Gandhi agreed, "it would be financially impossible for anybody to compensate the landlords."

QUESTIONNAIRE*

I—Experiences of Poverty and Injustice

- 1) In what ways have you experienced poverty and injustice? How often?

In what ways do others around you suffer? What are the main sufferings of the poor in India? How do you compare your life to that of the poor?

- 2) Has the standard of life of the poorest 30 to 40% of the people in your village or city improved in the last five years? If so, how much?
- 3) Are there great disparities in your village or city? Describe them. Are they increasing or diminishing?
- 4) Calculate your yearly and monthly income and expenditure. Making use of the information given in this booklet, find out which section of the Indian population you belong to.
- 5) With the help of a survey and/or of experts, study the average household income of various groups of people in your locality. What kind of family budget can one make with such an income?
- 6) In order to understand better the life of the poor,
 - collect newspaper cuttings, photographs, poems, songs and short essays and stories on various aspects of their existence;
 - conduct some interviews (Afterwards you could even write short descriptions of their life as Edward Rice has done in "Mother India's Children", Orbis Book, 1971, 176 pages);
 - reflect on films and novels of social significance. (You will find some useful information in "Chitra Bani", a book on film appreciation by Gaston Roberge, The

* We realise that these questions are too numerous to be discussed in total. We give them here so that the readers may make their own choices. In various circumstances in our work, we found these questions and exercises useful. The questionnaire found at the end of "The Development Debate" could also be made use of in the context of this booklet.

Little Flower Press, Calcutta, pp. 163-182, and in "Social Novels in Malayalam", CISRS; Bangalore, 1968, by Varghese Ittiavira);

—live in the midst of the poor and share their conditions of life for a few weeks or months.

- 7) What are your personal reflections on appendices 1 to 7 which describe various aspects of the life of the poor?

II – The Indian Situation

- 1) What are the main insights you have gained from this booklet? What are your comments and criticisms?
- 2) Do the data given in these pages more or less tally with your own experiences and observations? Can you complete them? How much do you know about India?
- 3) List, in order of priority, the 5 main problems and assets of India.
- 4) What reasons are usually brought forward to explain the slow progress of our country? How valid are they? What are the real causes of mass poverty in India?
- 5) How do you explain that, almost three decades after Independence, we have made so little progress towards social justice and a more equal distribution of consumption goods, incomes and wealth? What are the forces operating against such a reduction of inequalities?
- 6) Which social groups or classes are improving in India today? Who profits from our increased agricultural and industrial production? Who benefits from our bettered medical and educational facilities? Is our production oriented towards the needs of the poor?
- 7) Discuss the short text of Nyerere (appendix 4). Is poverty the real problem? Or is it the division between the rich and the poor? Respectively what importance do you give to increase in production and a reduction of inequalities in our present set-up?

II—The ideals and goals of our nation

- 1) Our Constitution and politicians often speak of equality, social justice and "egalitarian and socialist society." What is the precise meaning of these words? Has our nation really accepted these ideals and goals? How is it then that we have hardly made any progress towards them?
- 2) Do you personally accept these ideals and goals? Is inequality injustice? Is luxury, in the midst of poverty, injustice? Are you struggling to bring about justice? How?
- 3) Once a friend said: "If we believe in equality and socialism, we must practise them right now!" If we take into account the massive poverty of the Indian masses, what standard of life will we select? What can equality and socialism mean in our present context?
- 4) What do you think of the views expressed in appendices 8 to 10 on our present system and in particular on private property and existing laws and institutions? What do you think of the reflections of Mahatma Gandhi (appendices 11 & 12)? What are the practical implications of such statements?

IV—Case-study: The life of the Poor

A) Procedure:

- Select at least 5 families, preferably from different income groups. (Choose people who trust you)!
- Visit these families often and collect as much information as possible. Find out their life-story (background and education of the parents, their jobs and places of stay, etc.)
- Fill in the questionnaire for each family and for your own.

B) Questionnaire:

- 1-FAMILY DATA: Write down the name, age, role, occupation, and income of each member of the family, plus the annual income of the household.

- 2-EXPENDITURE FOR FOOD: Calculate the monthly and yearly expenditure on food and the average spent per person. Study the diet (quantity & quality); is it sufficient and balanced?
- 3-Find out the type of clothing they wear and the annual individual and family expenditure on clothing.
- 4-Study their housing conditions, plus the annual expenditure on shelter & lighting.
- 5-Calculate the health expenses of each individual and of the family for the previous year.
- 6-Find out the annual expenses on education and culture entertainment by each member and by the household.
- 7-Study the total annual consumption expenses of the family and the average per person.

c) Reflection:

- Study the health implications of the diet and housing conditions of these families.
- Compare these families, their income-groups and their style of life. Include your own family.
- With the help of official statistics, find the percentage of different income-groups in India, and in your state, district, city or village.
- With all these data, reflect on the concrete implications of belonging to such or such an income-group.

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- 7 — "Church and Social Justice", CISRS, Bangalore, 1975.
- 8 — "Economics and Politics of Garibi Hatao", Ajit Roy, Naya Prokash, Calcutta, 1973.

* Presuming that more advanced readers can find their own sources, we have kept this bibliography very elementary. The first two books - the second one is more scientific--, published every year by the Government of India, and the third one, published by Manorama, give us useful and up-to-date information on the Indian situation. The book of Agarwal, a well-known Indian economist, also gives a summary of the available data on our country. Among the various studies on poverty, we have selected the books of Dandekar-Rath and Fonseca. The former is classic on the subject, while the latter includes several articles of well-known scholars. The first part of "The Church and Social Justice" constitutes a very readable introduction on the problem of poverty and inequalities. Ajit Roy's book is more detailed, but remains rather easy to read.

MESSAGE TO OUR READERS
SUGGESTIONS FOR DEEPER STUDY AND FOLLOW-UP

Friends,

We hope that you have found, or will find, the reading of this booklet challenging and useful. We would like to offer you the following suggestions for a deeper study:

- Sum up for yourself the two sections 'A Land of Massive Poverty and Misery', and 'A Land of Inequalities and Injustices', and reflect on the most striking characteristics of the Indian Situation. Reply to our questionnaire.
- Read at least two of the books recommended in the bibliography.
- Create a study-group and discuss with your friends the Indian Situation. Do it in view of becoming an action-group.

We also hope that you will enter into contact with us especially if you are already involved, in some way, in India's struggle for development and social justice. Write to us and share with us:

- Your impressions, comments and questions on the opinions we have expressed in this booklet.
- Your own views and experiences in the field of development and social justice.
- Your desire for further reading material on topics of interest, for contact with people who can search with you in your study and action, for participation in seminars and training sessions.

We will try our very best to be of service to you.
Looking forward to hearing from you,

Sincerely,

The Editors

We thank the "Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society", Bangalore, for the permission to make use of their blocks (pp. 14, 22, 26 and 41) and Jeanne Devos for the Photographs (pp. 17 and 37).

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These booklets of about fifty pages each provide a non-technical, but comprehensive, introduction for people who are searching to deepen their reflection and action. They are addressed to all, irrespective of caste, creed and religion. With a bibliography and material for personal and group study, they constitute excellent instruments for concrete work. The booklets, with an asterisk, are already published; the others will appear by the end of April, 1977. (For further details, see inside cover page).